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THE  
PHILOSOPHICAL  
WORKS

Of the late Right Honorable

HENRY ST. JOHN,

LORD VISCOUNT BOLINGBROKE.

VOLUME II.

LONDON,

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# ESSAY

## THE SECOND.

### SECT. V.

**S**INCE I have mentioned the compatibility of some remains of the grossest polytheism with monotheism, and the principles on which the few might conform to the many, at least in the exteriors of religion; it is necessary that I should explain myself on these heads, which contain the sum of theology or the first philosophy, as it was understood by the most intelligent of the heathen, even in those countries where idolatry seemed to triumph the most.

It cannot be proved, without the help of the Old Testament, nor very well with it, as I have hinted above, that the unity of God was the primitive belief of mankind : neither does it appear to my apprehension that in fact it could be so according to all the rules of judging that may be drawn from reason and analogy. But yet I think it sufficiently evident, from reason and analogy both, that this first and great principle of natural theology could not fail to be discovered as soon as some men began to contemplate themselves and all the objects that surrounded them, and to push their philosophical researches

up from causes, that must be the effects of other causes, to a first, intelligent, self-existent cause of all things. Accordingly, we find that this discovery had been made in Egypt, and all the eastern nations that were famous for learning and knowledge, long before the dates of our most ancient memorials: whereas the same discovery does not appear to have been made by those people, whom we are able to view in these memorials, before they emerged out of ignorance into the light of knowledge and philosophical truth.

If I would descend into particular proofs, to confirm by the testimony of ancient writers what I advance on a probability that reason and analogy will support, I should not be at a loss to furnish them. But I consider that the work is done to my hands in a much better manner than I should be able to do it, and that it would be ridiculous to display my little pedlar's shop of learning before you, when so immense a storehouse of it lies open in the true intellectual system of the universe. There you will find a full and superabundant collection of proofs, that demonstrate, beyond a possibility of doubting, the unity of God to have been acknowledged by the most ancient of the idolatrous nations; tho' they may not demonstrate, as I think they do not, that this was the primitive faith of mankind: because we see that the things of this world are in a perpetual rotation, and because in several countries, at several periods, men have gone from idolatry to  
true

true religion, and have fallen from this back again into idolatry ; as we know that divers nations have gone from barbarity to politeness, and then have finished the round, and have returned from politeness to barbarity. EUSEBIUS, and a multitude of other writers after him, would have us believe that it was the particular prerogative of God's chosen people to be in possession of this knowledge, tho' the contrary may be proved, even from his own writings, as well as by the confession of saint AUSTIN, and of other fathers of the church: and JOSEPHUS\* asserts that ABRAHAM was the first who dared to say that there is but one God. ABRAHAM seems, according to this historian, to have derived his knowledge of the one true God from philosophical observation and meditation, before he became so well acquainted with the Supreme Being, as he was afterwards when God entered into a covenant with him. He could not derive it by tradition from his ancestors ; since JOSEPHUS and PHILO, and many of the rabbins, affirm that the father of the faithful was bred an idolater. Shall we think it strange now, that other men should discover, by their meditations on the works of God, what ABRAHAM discovered ? Has this fundamental article then of all true theology so little proportion to our clear and best determined ideas ? Or is it so repugnant to all the phaenomena of nature ? Much otherwise. It is so well proportioned to one, and so agreeable to both,

\* Antiq. Jud. lib. i. c. 7.

that we should be justly surpris'd to observe the affectation of restraining this knowledge to the patriarchs and their descendants, if it was not as easy as it is to discern that the Jews meant to do greater honor to their nation, and to reflect greater authority on their revelations, and that the Christians thought it proper to maintain this groundless assertion, in order to shew the preparation for, as well as the necessity of, a new revelation to the Jews and Gentiles both.

BUT let us not be deceived by the vanity of one, nor by the artifice of the other. God never left himself without a witness: which witness is the whole system of his works; tho' human reason must be cultivated to discover this, as well as other truths, and tho' it has not been therefore discovered alike by all people, and at all times. All truth requires some search, and many are to be acquired by labor. But there is no one that requires less labor than this, as there is no one that deserves or rewards our search so well. Thus I think, and in thinking thus I adore the goodness of the Supreme Being. Bishop WILKINS says, in his Principles of natural Religion\*, that "the things which distinguish human nature from all other things are  
 " the chief principles and foundations of religion,  
 " namely, the apprehension of a Deity, and an  
 " expectation of a future state after this life,  
 " which no other creature below man doth par-

\* L. ii. c. 1.

“ take of. — It is not reason in the general,  
 “ which is the form of human nature, because  
 “ there are some degrees of ratiocination, discern-  
 “ nible in the brute creation, and such a natural  
 “ sagacity as at least bears a near resemblance  
 “ to reason.” Thus the good bishop makes  
 the difference between reason in man and in other  
 animals very rightly to consist in the degree, not  
 in the kind, without perceiving how far this con-  
 cession of an apparent truth would carry him in  
 the dispute about souls, and material and imma-  
 terial spirits. But even in the case before us it  
 will not serve his purpose, nor evince that reason,  
 as it is determined to actions of religion, is the  
 particular form of human nature. It will prove at  
 most that some men have, and that no other spe-  
 cies of animals has in general, nor in particular  
 instances, the faculty we call reason in such a de-  
 gree, as to render them capable of discovering the  
 existence of the Supreme Being, and the duties of  
 natural religion. I said some men, because even  
 among the creatures that are all commonly, but  
 perhaps erroneously, comprehended in this species  
 on account of their outward form, there are stu-  
 pid savages, of whom it seems lawful to doubt  
 whether they are able to make greater discoveries  
 concerning God and religion, than the half-rea-  
 soning elephant. Upon the whole matter, they  
 who suppose all men incapable to attain a full  
 knowledge of natural theology and religion  
 without revelation, take from us the very es-  
 sence and form of man, according to the bishop,

and deny that any of us have that degree of reason which is necessary to distinguish our species, and sufficient to lead us to the unity of a first intelligent cause of all things.

Now since the unity of God might be known by a due use of human reason, and since it was actually known to the ancient legislators, who established the mysteries spoken of for the support of religion, and religion for the support of government, it cannot seem marvellous that this doctrine was taught in the celebration of the greater mysteries. The marvel would be, if it had not been taught in them. But then there is as little room to wonder that the same men should establish the belief of a divine monarchy, as they did establish it. By degrading the Pagan gods, they destroyed the aristocracy of heaven: and by reasoning from human ideas of order, they ran of course into an hypothesis, which has been adopted in some manner or other by the Jewish, the Christian, the Mahometan, and every other system of theology. They supposed that the making and governing the world required the ministration of a multitude of inferior beings; beings not eternal, but produced in time by emanation, or by some other inconceivable manner of generation, concerning all which there has been more absurdity propagated by Pagans and Christians, whether heretics or orthodox, than all the bedlams of the world can match. When they reasoned *à posteriori*, from the works  
to



to the existence of one God, they reasoned well, and they arrived at truth. But when they reasoned in the same manner from oeconomical and political institutions of human wisdom, they reasoned ill, and fell into error. This error however was pious error: and pious error is more excusable than pious fraud. They dared not presume to suppose the Supreme incomprehensible and ineffable Being employed constantly, nor at all immediately, about human affairs; and yet they thought divine providence necessary in the general conduct of these, as they discerned plainly that it was necessary to preserve and rule the great machine of the universe. Much less dared they suppose this Being to be the tutelary local divinity of any one people, and much less still to be an earthly king in the literal acceptation of the word. They were not enough familiarised with the belief of divine revelations to frame such conceptions as these.

SOME of their philosophers, indeed, refined so sublimely their speculations about the Supreme Being, that they grew quite unintelligible. God was, in their conceit, above all essence, tho' existent, above all intelligence, tho' intelligent. He was in all things, and contained all things :

“ JUPITER est quodcunque vides, quocunque  
“ moveris.”

He pervaded, he animated the whole world; and, like the soul, gave life and motion to all the parts

of it. In him they lived, and moved, and had their being. Some of these men therefore, whilst they seemed to worship the parts of this visible corporeal system, might really worship the invisible God alone, in the various manifestations of his wisdom, energy, and power. I say some of them; because it must be confessed that some even of those who had been consummated by admission into the greater mysteries, were not entirely orthodox on this head. They adopted notions more intelligible, and less unworthy of the deity, than many that have been mentioned, but such however as had too near an analogy to man, and to the affairs of mankind. They imagined a divine monarchy on a human plan, the administration of which was not carried on by the immediate agency of God himself, but mediately, as in terrestrial monarchies, by that of inferior agents, according to the ranks and the provinces allotted to them. Such were the celestial gods, the sun, the moon, the stars, or the spirits more properly who inhabited and presided in them, who directed their motions, and maintained their influences. Such again, but in a lower order, were the etherial and ærial demons, the genii and the lares, who dwelled below the moon, and had little else in charge but what related to man, and even to particular men. Such again were heroes and public benefactors, who might well be admitted into the celestial hierarchy; for, by the very doctrine of the mysteries, private devotions, and the exercise of private virtues, could  
render

render men like to gods here, and gods hereafter.

SINCE greater purity of manners, and a more internal devotion were required of the initiated than of the vulgar, it is but reasonable to conclude that in the mysteries the gods were reformed, as well as their worshippers ; that JUPITER was no longer the whoremaster he had been represented, nor MERCURY the pimp, nor VENUS the common strumpet, and so on. But still it must be confessed that those fictitious divinities, which superstition and poetry had invented, which the lesser mysteries had preserved, and which the greater had tolerated, were alike numerous and ridiculous, as well as the rites and ceremonies instituted in honor of them, and practised even by those who were consummated in the greater mysteries. Thus in the eleusinian orgia, for instance, not to quote those of BACCHUS, the most extravagant and the soonest corrupted of any, the wanderings of CERES in search of her daughter were dramatically represented, and the initiated ran about like frantic people with lighted torches in their hands.

IF this apparent idolatry moves your indignation, call to mind the distinction of a worship of latria and a worship of dulia. They, who acknowledged but one God, could pay the first to that God alone : they could not be idolaters. They might honor the other divinities, as your church

church honors her saints, by the second. If this ridiculous worship moves your laughter, have a care: it was in those days just as it is in ours, and in Paganism just as it is in Christianity. The intelligent Pagans, who were consummated in the mysteries, could explain away, no doubt, some of the apparent absurdities of these rites, and give good prudential reasons for their compliance with others. CELSUS had boasted that he was fully acquainted with the Christian religion, and on that supposed acquaintance had presumed to censure it. ORIGEN, as I find him quoted by CUDWORTH, shews CELSUS that it was not less impertinent in him to pretend to be well informed of Christian theology, than it would be in a stranger who sojourned in Egypt to pretend to be well informed of the Egyptian theology, tho' he had not been instructed in the mysteries of it by the priests, who were alone able to instruct him. ORIGEN adds, that not only among the Egyptians, but among all other nations, who had, besides their religious fables, a secret doctrine, the religious rites were performed rationally by ingenious persons, whilst the superficial vulgar looked no further, in the observation of them, than the external symbol or ceremony. This was a full answer to CELSUS: and so far ORIGEN makes the case of Paganism and Christianity the same.

Now if they were the same in his time, sure I am they are the same in this respect in ours :  
and

and that you may see this the more clearly, and learn not to pass too rash a censure on the poor Pagans, let us feign for a moment that ABAMMON, or any other Heathen priest you please, is risen from the dead. He is curious in the first place to visit Egypt and the east : but he finds them subdued by ignorant and barbarous people, and no traces left of their ancient civility, policy, and erudition; the countries devastated, the cities laid in ruins, and none of the colleges of the learned to be found. He hastens away to the west; for he is told that in those regions that border on the Atlantic sea, arts and sciences have revived, and philosophy has fixed her throne. As he advances thither, he finds some faint resemblance of the plenty and of the magnificence of ancient Egypt. Stately temples strike his eyes, and excite his curiosity the most. He observes that one is dedicated to the Trinity. He takes this to be some triad into which TYRHO had mangled the deity, and he laments that Isis had not joined the parts again together; for he cannot be supposed to know what the Nicæan council has decreed for this purpose. He observes that another is dedicated to the mother of God, and imagines that CYBELE may be adored in it. Others he observes in great number, and all distinguished by some particular invocation. Whilst he is thus employed, a procession comes by. ABAMMON sees with pleasure the priests of Isis attend it in their white garments, and with their heads shaved according to the  
Egyptian

Egyptian rite; but he is at a loss to guess what a cross of wood, which is carried before them, can mean. He remembers that malefactors were executed in some countries on such an instrument of cruelty; and therefore his surprise increases, when he is told that the son of God suffered on it to satisfy divine justice, and to expiate the sins of mankind. This calls to his mind perhaps the human sacrifices that were so long in use among the Phenicians, and other nations. But he is still in doubt; for among them men were sacrificed to appease the gods, and here a god is the victim. He follows the procession into one of the temples. The service begins; he gets as near the altar as he can. He sees no preparations for any sacrifice, but observes that the priest holds something white and round in his hand. He asks what it is, and is told that it is a wafer. He observes him pour some liquor into a cup. He asks, and is told that it is wine. A moment after the priest having held up this wafer and this cup successively over his head, the people prostrate themselves in acts of adoration. They bid him do the same; for they assure him that the wafer is become the body, and the wine the blood, of God. The service over, he has time to survey the church. He sees altars on every side, and pictures or statues over all. He sees tapers and lamps burning even by day. The pictures and statues he concludes to be the gods of this people, and the tapers and lamps to have been lighted at some sacred fire, at that perhaps

which

which ZOROASTER brought from heaven. He stares at an old man with a long beard, looking out of the clouds at a young man tied to a stake and whipped, and at a white pigeon hovering in the midst of the picture. As he proceeds on his journey of curiosity, he sees in another temple the same old man talking to a beautiful virgin, the virgin seeming to receive orders from him, and thrusting a little child head foremost into a mill, four monstrous beasts, such as Africa never produced, assisting twelve venerable persons to turn the mill, before which an arch-priest, with a triple crown on his head, and a golden cup in his hand, is represented kneeling. The arch-priest receives wafers that fall from the mill into the cup. He gives them to a man who wears a red cap; the man of the red cap gives them to one who wears a broad pointed cap; he of the broad pointed cap gives them to one who wears a square black cap; and he of the square black cap doles them about to the people. ABAMMON observes over the door of the same temple an animal that has four heads, the head of a man, the head of an ox, the head of an eagle, and the head of a lion. He observes animals, to whom peculiar respect seems to be paid; and whole flocks of sheep and whole droves of cattle. These he takes for symbols; and they have so plain an allusion to those of Egypt, when Egypt was the mistress of symbolical theology, that ABAMMON would be ready to carry himself back to his own age and country in imagination,

gination, if the herds of swine, that have their place too in this sacred painting, did not give him a good deal of scandal. The people he converses with swear to him in the most solemn manner that they adore one God alone, and that they abhor polytheism and idolatry. He hears them, takes his leave, and goes away persuaded that they are polytheists as much, and idolaters more, than he or any of his fathers were. This fable may serve to shew you that it is not only unreasonable, but unsafe to censure any religion rashly, and without sufficient information, as Pagans have calumniated Judaism and Christianity, and Jews and Christians Paganism and Mahometanism. The weapons of retaliation are always at hand, tho' those of defence are not: and we see that even the Christian religion is not invulnerable. But it is time I should proceed to other corruptions of philosophy, of the first especially, and to other forms under which error has been propagated.

## S E C T. VI.

WHAT has been said above, has been said generally and hypothetically: for what man in his senses would presume to be particular or positive on matters of so great antiquity, and so imperfectly and darkly delivered down on authorities for the most part very precarious? I think, however, that it is probable. It is probable that allegory, the refuge of ignorance, the  
veil



veil of error, and the instrument of metaphysical and theological deception in it's abuse, was one great support of Paganism. It rendered the outside of this religion pompous and shewish: and this was enough to raise and to maintain a respect and veneration for it in the minds of the vulgar, who never look further than the outside, and who are fond of the marvellous. It is probable that, in the mysteries instituted by the first legislators to be a further support of religion, such allegories and symbols as were kept in use, and such as were more rationally invented for instruction, not for deception, were explained in such a manner, as to serve all the purposes of morality, and to form men to be better citizens, by making them better men, than it was thought that civil laws and institutions alone could oblige them to be. It is probable, in the last place, that the few who were consummated in these mysteries, and to whom the hidden doctrine was revealed, acknowledged the unity of the Godhead, learned to join a sort of mitigated polytheism with monotheism, and, tho' they conformed in the public worship, to have their private belief, as I am persuaded that you have yours.

It is plain enough that the knowledge of the one true God would have been acquired by men, and would have been preserved in the world, if no such people as the Jews had ever been: and nothing can be more impertinent than the hypothesis,

thesis, that this people, the least fit perhaps on many accounts that could have been chosen, was chosen to preserve this knowledge. It was acquired, and it was preserved, independently of them, among the Heathen philosophers; and it might have become, nay, it did probably become, the national belief in countries unknown to us, or even in those who were fallen back into ignorance before they appear in the traditions we have; just as it became the first principle of religion among the inhabitants of the Theban dynasty\*, who held that there was no God but one, and this one God was represented under a human figure by some, with an egg, the symbol of the world, coming out of his mouth; with a scepter and a belt in his hand, and with other emblems. Thus he was described by PORPHYRY, as EUSEBIUS relates: and what other Being can we understand to be meant by this description but that God who spake, and the world was made?

Thus the theology of the Heathen was founded on original truth, but was corrupted afterwards, as other theologies have been, in its progress, and by the extensions of it. The Heathens, at least all of them who deserve to be quoted, acknowledged one sole Supreme Being, the oldest of all Beings, according to THALES, because unmade or unproduced, that is, self-existent,

\* PLUT. DE ISIDE ET OSIRIDE.

and because he alone is so\*. But then they corrupted their ideas of the majesty of this Being by those which they had of human majesty; for, by meaning to think with more reverence, they thought unworthily of God. They lost sight of him, if I may be allowed such an expression, and suffered inferior imaginary beings to intercept a worship due to him alone. They reasoned so little, or so ill, on other notions much better associated with this notion of a God, such as those of omniscience, of omnipresence, and of that energy of omnipotence which is sufficient by one simple act of the will, for thus we must speak to speak intelligibly, to create and govern an universe, that they thought it much more agreeable to nature and truth to account for all the phænomena of the physical and moral worlds by supposing the agency of second and third gods, of super-celestial and celestial divinities, and of demons, than to have recourse to the first God, who dwelled in darkness impenetrable, or in light that blinded the human sight: for both these images were employed, and both signify the same thing. Thus they attempted to reconcile monotheism with a sort of mitigated polytheism; for such, at least, I think it was rendered by those consummated in the mysteries, and such I called it before; tho' FLUTARCH says expressly, in the place I have just now quoted, not only that the most ancient Egyp-

\* *DIOG. LAERT.*

tians held the unity of God, but also that they believed no mortal could be a God; which opinion was sufficient of itself to degrade numberless beings, that went under the vague and equivocal denomination of gods.

THIS system, made up of monotheism and of something very near akin, nearer than they who held it imagined, to a polytheism, inconsistent with the former, proved itself to be a very rank soil: and immense crops of error sprung up from it, of error more ingenious and more plausible than the superstitious opinions of savage nations, but yet as real. Tho' the belief of many inferior gods did not destroy the belief of one Supreme, it maintained however a sort of idolatrous worship, since it maintained a sort of polytheism. For as we cannot suppose that the vulgar, the uninitiated, adored the true God, even intentionally, so we cannot suppose that the initiated, nor even the consummated, held constantly in mind some such casuistical distinction as that of *latria* and *dulia*, when they offered sacrifices to other divinities, and invoked them directly. That learned man CUDWORTH seems to think more favorably even of the vulgar, somewhere in his famous fourth chapter: and I am not ignorant that the doctrine of a mediation between God and man was established in the heathen theology. But I know too that the suspicion I have may be justified by the example of Christians, who hold a mediation likewise:

wife : and of these the former seem the most excusable. The Christian believes that he may have access at all times to the throne of grace ; but the poor Heathen, filled with a religious horror, durst not approach the divine monarch, except through the mediation of his ministers. Etherial and aërial demons stood in the lowest rank of superior powers. To these he addressed himself, if they were evil, to soften their malice, if they were good, to obtain their mediation with the celestial, and by them with the super-celestial gods. He, who durst not presume to think that the prayers of men could reach to these, might offer up sacrifices and prayers to those.

PHILOSOPHERS and priests, who led the multitude in matters of science and religion, were the same men in Egypt and the ancient kingdoms of the east for many ages, how much soever they were distinguished in later times, and in other countries. Whilst they continued such, they profited alternately, in one character, of what they did in another. Philosophers in prose and verse helped to fill the calendar of the priests : and theology became the assistant of philosophy wherever she was wanted. Thus, in the case before us, when philosophers had once established a divine monarchy, at the head of which they placed the first God, enthroned in darkness, or hid by excess of light, creating and governing all things by several orders of inferior beings, there was a sort of gradation formed

from man to God most inconsistently with some other of their notions. In favor of this gradation, and to make it appear the shorter, the souls of men were deemed immortal and of a celestial origin. They were raised up, at least, to the very confines of divinity: and demons, and beings superior to demons, had little precedence above them, if any. They were confined indeed to human bodies, and degraded to animate these systems of organised matter by a temporary union with them, but they returned afterwards to their proper and kindred stars. The others were confined too, and had their respective powers and provinces allotted to them in the general government even of sublunary affairs.

THEOLOGY did not fail to build on foundations philosophy had laid: and the professors of both improved the opportunity they had of feigning a close correspondence between heaven and earth. They assumed that they had the means of knowing what was decreed above, that they could disclose the will of the gods, avert their anger, procure their favor, and exercise a coercive power over demons. They imagined spirits that belonged to the several planets, fiery and ærial, aquatic and terrestrial: so that men, and not men alone, but all other animals, plants, metals, and stones, partook of these different natures, and of the different influences which descended from above. The distinction of good  
and.

and evil demons was extremely useful in accounting for the physical and moral phænomena; and it doubled the fees of the priests. Accordingly, this distinction had been established in the remotest antiquity, when philosophers did what they do still, and, instead of tracing causes up gradually from their effects, take the less laborious task of inventing them at once and by a fallacy of imagination. JUSTIN the martyr found our Christian devil precipitated from heaven, in the nineteenth book of HOMER's Iliad. PLUTARCH quotes EMPEDOCLES for writing that the evil demons had been driven from thence by the gods: and you may have the word of MAR-SILIUS FICINUS, in his Dissertation on the Apology of SOCRATES, that PLATO had heard in Egypt that JUPITER cast the impure demons into hell, as well as he had learned from PHERECYDES of Syros, either by tradition or by his writings, how several of these spirits had rebelled against God under the conduct of OPHIONEUS. These reprobate spirits became the instruments, or rather the authors of all physical and moral evil: and the protection of such as had not fallen from this purity was sought, to prevent or remove this malignant influence. The one procured to men peace of mind, and health of body. The others inspired lusts, inflamed passions, and, entering into the bodies of men as well as of other animals, tormented and distorted their limbs, and played a thousand extravagant pranks in the wantonness of their power and malice.

SUCH absurdities as these, and many others which I will not take the trouble to collect, being grafted on a few true principles, composed the theological wisdom of the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, and corrupted the whole mass. I say their theological, for their political and moral wisdom deserves to be mentioned without a sneer. The relations of it, and of the effects of it, which we find in HERODOTUS, DIODORUS SICULUS, and other ancient authors, inspire us with admiration and respect: and it is not possible to account for the folly and madness of men on these theological subjects, who were so reasonable and so wise on all others, except by resolving it into the vanity of philosophers and the craft of priests. If these men had pretended to none of this chimerical knowledge, but had contented themselves to teach, in the simplicity of truth, the little we are able to know of the divine nature and the first philosophy, their systems, which they had the rage of extending, would have been too narrow for their vanity; and their wealth, which they had the rage of increasing by this lucrative trade, would have been too little for their avarice.

It is hard to say which was greater, the impudence of their pretensions, the art with which they conducted them, or the success they had in imposing them on mankind. The sky was spread, like the great volume of fate, before them. They  
and



and their adepts alone could read in it, and discover the secrets it contained. The whole mystery of celestial influences was known to them alone. They could procure them, remove them, change them, and fix them to certain portions of matter, or even fix the spirits themselves, who directed these influences, to statues prepared by the rules of their magical art. They had mysterious methods of disentangling the soul from corporeal incumberments, and preparing it for every kind of supernatural illumination. The mind was composed for prophetic dreams, the eyes were strengthened for celestial visions. They received inspiration, and they contemplated the gods that gave it. How they understood this contemplation, how they saw the forms of the gods\*, and how the presence of the gods was declared to them, might be explained, perhaps, in much as intelligible a manner as the presence of demons in their statues was explained. Suppose “a wall of looking-glass, and so disposed at “ the same time as to occasion an echo†. Your “ figure and your voice too will be reflected from “ it, and you will be in some sense in that wall.” I hurry over all these impertinences, and I conclude by saying, that from this conspiracy of philosophy and theology in the establishment of theurgic and natural magic have proceeded all the

\* *Praesentiam saepe divi suam declarant. Saepe visae formae deorum.* Cic. *De nat. deor. Lib. ii.*

† *MARS. FICIN.*

folly and knavery of judicial astrology, of horoscopes, of spells, of charms, of talismans, of wizards, of witches, and of rosycrucians, and all the enthusiasm, blasphemy, and superstition that have accompanied these excommunicated persons and things, and that might have been reproached with great reason, upon many occasions, to the orthodox persons themselves who excommunicated both. I say, might have been reproached, and I say it with reason; since many of the opinions which these orthodox persons hold, or have held, may be traced up through the same schools, through which the greatest extravagancies of astrologers, magicians, and rosycrucians have descended to these days. But we must not stop here. We must pursue the propagation of error in higher instances than these, and in such as prevail under some form or other even at this day, even among men the most enlightened in our enlightened age.

PAGAN theists, who deemed it too great presumption to worship the Supreme Being, might well have thought it still more presumptuous to dogmatise about his nature and attributes: and since they held the unity of the first cause of all things, they should have seen the absurdity and inconsistency of analysing this monad into several principles, and of assuming other super-celestial and super-essential beings. All this was done however, the absurdity was put in practice, and the inconsistency was admitted into the  
first

first philosophy. Reason was overborne in this case by affections and passions, as reason is in almost every case where that rational animal man is to decide; and excessive curiosity and excessive vanity prevailed against the plainest dictates of common sense. God has proportioned, in every respect, our means of knowledge to our station here, and to our real wants in it. The bodies, that surround us, operate continually on us: and their operations concern not only our well or ill being, but our very being. We are fitted therefore to acquire, by the help of our senses properly employed, by experiment and industry, such a degree of human knowledge about them, as is sufficient for the necessary uses of human life, and no more. In like manner, the knowledge of the Creator is on many accounts necessary to such a creature as man: and therefore we are made able to arrive, by a proper exercise of our mental faculties, from a knowledge of God's works to a knowledge of his existence, and of that infinite power and wisdom which are demonstrated to us in them. Our knowledge concerning God goes no further. We are in absolute ignorance of the real essence and inward constitution of every sensible object. How much less reason is there to expect any knowledge of the manner of being, and of the nature and essence of the invisible God, or of his physical and moral attributes, beyond that which his works, the effects of his nature and attributes, communicate to us! This degree, this sufficient degree

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of knowledge concerning God is a fixed point, on one side of which lies atheism, and metaphysical and theological blasphemy too often on the other.

NOTWITHSTANDING this which has been said, and which appears to be of the utmost evidence, philosophers have proceeded, without any regard to it, from the most early ages; and the whole sum of theology has been in every age a confused rhapsody of discordant, fluctuating hypotheses. The science to which they pretended was unattainable. Their doctrines therefore, tho' dogmatically taught, and implicitly received in their several schools, were nothing more than arbitrary hypotheses: and hypotheses being so extravagantly prolific, that one often engenders twenty, it is no wonder that the confusion increased, that the more these doctrines were explained the darker they grew, and that the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians were, if possible, less intelligible than their masters, and all those who had gone before them. I mention these particularly, because they were the great theological doctors of Greece, and the great channels through which all the metaphysical jargon, and all the superstitious opinions of ancient nations, have come down to us, intermingled with some scraps of good sense and of true theism. PLUTARCH says there was nothing unreasonable, fabulous, nor superstitious in the sacred institutions of the Egyptians, from whose schools we  
know

know that PYTHAGORAS and PLATO derived their theology. But, on the contrary, he says that all of them had moral and useful causes, and historical and philosophical meanings. But the priest made his court, at the expence of truth, to the priests, to whom he addressed his treatise concerning ISIS and OSIRIS: and we shall do better to give credit, on this occasion, to DIONYSIUS HALICARNASSENSIS\*, who confesses, that altho' many of the Greek fables shewed the operations of nature by allegories, and were composed for consolation under the calamities of life, for taking away perturbations of mind, for removing false opinions, and for other very good and commendable purposes, yet they are to be condemned in general, many as impious, all as pernicious; and he praises ROMULUS for admitting none of them.

## S E C T. VII.

**I**T may be worth while to give two instances of the extravagant hypotheses which philosophy and theology conspired to frame, as soon, perhaps, as men began to turn their thoughts to these subjects; for we find ditheism and tritheism established in the most early ages, concerning which we have any anecdotes.

THEY who believed a self-existent Being, the first intelligent cause of all things, must have be-

\* Ant. Rom. Lib. ii.

lieved this Being to be all-perfect. But then, as they modelled his government on an human plan, so they conceived his perfections, moral as well as physical, by human ideas; tho' they did not presume to limit the former by the latter. Thus, God was said to be the first good; but then the general notion, or the abstract idea, as some philosophers would call it, of this good, was not only taken from human goodness, but was considered too with little or no other relation than to man, that excellent creature, the very image of his Maker, and one-half of whom, at least, was divine. A question arose therefore on these hypotheses. How could evil come into a system, of which God was the author, and man the final cause? This question made a further hypothesis necessary. It was "*dignus vindice nodus*:" and another first God, another co-eternal and co-equal principle was introduced to solve it, a first cause of all evil, as the other was of all good. The contest between these independent and rival powers began by a struggle, some have said by a battle, when one of them endeavoured to reduce matter, which these philosophers held to be a third principle, tho' not a third God, into an orderly uniform frame and regular motion, and when the other endeavoured to maintain disorder, deformity, irregularity, and to spoil, at least, the great design. The same contest was supposed to continue in the government that commenced at the formation of the world, and physical or moral good and evil to be

be produced, as one or other of these gods prevailed.

PLUTARCH\*, who was a zealous assertor of this doctrine himself, asserted it to have been likewise that of the Magians, the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, and of every philosopher almost of any note among the Greeks from PYTHAGORAS down to PLATO. He represents it as an opinion settled in the minds of men by the authority of legislators and divines, of philosophers and poets, and not only as an opinion, but as an article of faith, on which sacrifices and religious rites were established. But every man has some favorite folly, and this was his. BAYLE himself is forced to confess that the representation is exaggerated. How indeed is it possible to believe that such numbers of reasonable men could concur, from age to age, in so great an absurdity? Some of them might, and it is probable that they did, hold an opinion very near akin to this, and derived from it, but not the same that PLUTARCH held, and the Marcionites and Manicheans after him. This hypothesis was mitigated by another; and, instead of a god unproduced and self-existent, an inferior being, produced and dependent, was assumed to be the author of evil. The preceptor of TRAJAN could not help admitting, most inconsistently with himself, that the two principles were not of equal force, and that the

\* Lib. de ISIDE et OSIRIDE.

good principle was prevalent : but even further, that ZOROASTER, and by consequence the magi, called the good principle alone God, and the evil principle a demon. This mitigated hypothesis was adopted by orthodox Christians, as the other was by heretics, and has therefore supported itself longer than the other; tho' the other spread more among Christians from the third century, and before MANES down to the seventh and even to the ninth, than it had ever spread and prevailed in the Pagan world. But whatever success these hypotheses have had, when we consider even that, which I have called mitigated, as a Pagan dogma, we must say that altho' it does not imply contradiction so manifestly as the other, yet it implies it as strongly, and is still more injurious to the Supreme Being. It implies it as strongly: for to affirm that there are two self-existent gods independent and co-equal, who made and govern the world, is not a jot more absurd, than it is to affirm that a God sovereignly good, and at the same time almighty and allwise, suffers an inferior dependent being to deface his work in any sort, and to make his other creatures both criminal and miserable. It is still more injurious to the Supreme Being: for if we had been to reason with Pagan ditheists on their own notions, we might have insisted that it is no disgrace to a prince to reign according to the constitution of his country jointly with another, as the ephori reigned at Sparta, and the consuls governed at Rome, and that the ill government



vernment of his partner reflects no dishonor on him. But that to say of a monarch in the true sense of the word, who is invested with absolute power, that he suffers one of his subjects to abuse the rest without control, and to draw them into crimes and revolts, for which he punishes them afterwards, is the most injurious accusation that can be brought. That heathen theists of common sense reasoned in this manner we cannot doubt: and that they did so I find a remarkable proof, tho' a negative one, and brought for another purpose, in the Intellectual system. CELSUS objected to the Christians, that they believed a certain adversary to God, the devil, called in Hebrew Satan, and that they affirmed impiously that the greatest God was disabled from doing good, or withstood in doing it, by this adversary. Now CELSUS, who made this objection to the Christians, would not have made it, I think, if he himself had held the mitigated deism we have mentioned, whether he held the other or no.

LET us speak of tritheism, the other instance proposed to shew how natural theology was rendered a confused heap of absurd and inconsistent hypotheses, by men who presumed to dogmatise beyond the bounds of human knowledge.

DR. CUDWORTH could not well conceive, no more than LA MOTHE LE VAYER, how a trinity  
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of divine hypostases should be first discovered merely by human wit and reason. He would have it believed therefore a revelation to the Jews, and a tradition derived from them. But he supports his suggestion ill. That the Samothracians held a certain trinity of gods, which they called by an Hebrew name Cabbirim, or the mighty gods; and that there are in the books of the Old testament certain significations of a plurality in the Deity, are allegations so vague and inconclusive that they prove nothing, or might be turned to prove what the learned author would have disliked very much, to prove it ill perhaps, but as well at least as they prove his suggestion. The other proof he brings may be equivocal as well as weak, in the manner in which it is expressed. He quotes PROCLUS for saying that the trinity contained in the Chaldaic oracles was at first a theology of divine tradition, or a revelation, or a divine cabala; and he quotes the Greek of PROCLUS, after which he adds, viz. “amongst  
 “the Hebrews first, and from them afterwards  
 “communicated to the Egyptians and other  
 “nations.” If PROCLUS now had said all this in terms, or had spoke to the effect of the additional words, which I am unable to determine, not having the book at this time in my power, the proof would have been no better than either of the former. But if the additional words are not of PROCLUS, but of the doctor, the doctor seeming to quote PROCLUS, quotes himself, in respect to the point he was concerned to secure,  
 that

that this divine revelation could be made to no other nation, if it was made, than to the Hebrews.

I PROCEED now to say that it is not so hard to conceive how human wit and reason might, and why philosophers did, invent the hypothesis of a trinity, without any obligation to the Jews, who, from their exode to their return from their seventy years captivity, and from thence till all their books were written or reduced into a canon, borrowed much more than they lent.

THE confusion and obscurity of the first philosophy, as it was taught in the antiquity to which we look up in this discourse, was in no part greater than in this of the trinity. They who have pretended to explain it, to improve it, and to build upon it, have only perplexed it the more: some, because they were as chimerical as the first inventors; and others, because they had some particular purpose to serve. What is unintelligible in PLATO, for instance, or in the fragments that we have of pythagorean doctrines, you will not perceive to grow more intelligible when you have consulted JAMBlichus, PORPHYRY, PLOTINUS, any of the philosophers of these sects, or any of the Christian fathers who sanctified a great deal of this heathen lore. MARSILIUS FICINUS, and the whole crowd of modern translators, commentators, and collectors, will help you as little. Even CUDWORTH,

the best of them, leaves you where he found you, and gives you little else than a nonsensical paraphrase of nonsense. It was not his fault. The good man passed his life in the study of an unmeaning jargon; and as he learned, he taught.

If he had not been fond of giving a divine original to a doctrine that became a fundamental article of Christianity, he might have deduced the original of this very human hypothesis, for such it was in the pagan world, from what he had asserted and proved already. He had shewn how poets and philosophers promoted polytheism by allegorising corporeal nature. Was it hard then to imagine that they allegorised incorporeal nature likewise? They deified sensible, why should they not deify intellectual, objects? They increased the number of their gods, by deifying even mixed modes and relations: why should they not do the same, by making ideal substances of the wisdom and power of God, and of that divine spirit which they imagined to pervade all things? There was no need of inspiration, nor any extraordinary communication to prompt them to do so: and it would have been matter of wonder if the whole system of nature had not been reduced, as it was, into one body of corrupt theology, by the Egyptians and the other nations of the east, and by the Greeks who philosophised many centuries together on the same foolish principles.

THE habitude of erecting extravagant hypotheses into doctrines of the first philosophy, and of founding natural theology on the most unnatural principles, might seduce men easily into tritheism, without any such apparent reason for it as they had for ditheism. But if they thought themselves obliged to invent the latter in order to account for the existence of evil, they saw that there was a necessity for inventing the former, in order to give an appearance of consistency to the very best of their theistical systems. They had gods and demi-gods and demons enough. But none of them could be reputed first causes or principles, and three such at least were necessary to be found.

WHEN they had imagined a celestial, on the plan of a terrestrial, monarchy, they found place and rank and business for all the imaginary beings that superstition had created : but they confined the monarch, like an eastern prince, to the inmost recesses of his palace, where they supposed him to remain immovable. They acknowledged him, very rationally, to be the source of all intelligence and wisdom and power, as well as the fountain of all existence, and the spring of all life and motion throughout the whole extent of being. But then they imagined, very irrationally, that this unity was such an immovable essence as could not have acted in the formation, and as did not act in the preservation and government, of

the world. They raised their notions of the divine majesty so high, or, to speak more properly, they refined so metaphysically upon them, for they cannot be ever raised too high when they are kept within the bounds of our real ideas, that they placed the Supreme God not only far out of the sight of human intellect, but even out of the reach, if I may say so, of that system whereof they confessed him to be the first cause. There were, indeed, according to them, inferior generated gods, participant in some sort of his wisdom, and delegates in some degree of his power; but this participation and this delegation were not sufficient: and to make such a system, as that of the universe, the very wisdom and the very power of the supreme self-existent Being were necessary. No cause out of the Deity could produce such effects; and all other beings with participated wisdom and delegated power would be but second causes at best, acting indeed, but acted upon, without any adequate efficacy of their own.

WE may very well believe that some such considerations as these determined the most ancient philosophers to assume a trinity of divine hypostases in the godhead; a second proceeding eternally from the first; and a third proceeding eternally from the second, or from the first and the second: subsistencies, beings, not independent, like the good and the evil god, but distinct; subordinate, but subordinate within the Deity,

Deity, and far above the highest order of generated gods. It is probable that neither ZORASTER, nor the magi, nor MERCURY TRISMEGIST, nor the Egyptian divines, were as ingenious to abstract and distinguish and to invent new words, as the nicean fathers, or the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians. They might content themselves with establishing the general difference I have mentioned between these three, and all their other gods. CUDWORTH says that they understood by this trinity the Godhead : and I remember to have read somewhere, in PLOTINUS perhaps, or in some other madman of that stamp, that there are emanations within the Deity, as well as emanations that go out of it. The second of these gods, then, was the divine intellect personified, an emanation that did not emanate, if you allow the term, out of the Deity. The third was the divine Spirit, another emanation, that did not emanate neither. Thus the difficulties that embarrassed these great divines might seem to be taken away ; for tho' the immoveable essence of the unity could not move, nor act, nor pervade, and become the soul of the world immediately, yet all this might be done by the second and third persons of the Godhead, who exerted all the energy of the first.

THAT such an hypothesis was established among the most ancient of the heathen divines cannot be doubted, tho' their doctrines are come to us in broken scraps very imperfectly, and

therefore very darkly. This imperfect and general knowledge is enough however to satisfy any reasonable curiosity, and it leaves room enough for great scholars to dispute and wrangle about particulars. Let us leave that part to them, and pursue reflections of another kind.

SOME, and I think very few, of the Greek philosophers were rank atheists. **DIAGORAS** was one: and, if it be true that **DEMOCRITUS** bought and instructed him, he might pass easily from the absurdity of believing that the visible species of things and the ideas we receive from them are gods, to that of believing that there is no God. **THEODORUS** was another: and he was so zealous in his atheism, that he wrote several books to maintain it. **STRATO** was not quite so positive in the denial of any Supreme Being; but he was very positive that he had no need of assuming any to account for the making of the world. He went through all the parts of it, and pretended to shew that all of them were effects of natural causes, of matter and motion, "*Naturalibus fieri aut factum esse dicit ponderibus et motibus,*" says **TULLY** \*. **EPICURUS** acknowledged gods, but gods so extremely ridiculous, that he was guilty of something worse than atheism, whilst he affected theism, "*invidiae detestandae causa,*" says the same **TULLY**.

\* Acad. Quaef. Lib. iv.



SUCH philosophers as these imagined a sort of plastic nature working blindly, but necessarily, and requiring no superior principle to direct her action. The greatest part of the ancient naturalists thought very differently from these. They established a material, and an efficient, intelligent cause of all the phaenomena. Tho' all of them believed matter eternal, they had various opinions about the material cause. It was to some an assemblage of all the elements massed and confounded and fermenting together, "ru-  
 "dis indigestaque moles." To others it was some one select element; to THALES water, or perhaps a fluid chaos; to ANAXIMENES air; to ARCHELAUS air condensed into water, the principle of THALES; or rarified into aether, the fiery principle of the Stoics. Their notions of the efficient intelligent cause were not more uniform than these; but as these were different manners of conceiving the same thing, so were the others. The material cause, under every notion of it, was matter still; the efficient cause, under every notion of it, was intelligent still: and all the notions of this kind, which theistical philosophers entertained, were less repugnant, if I am not much deceived, than it is commonly thought. It seems to me that the differences between them were more apparent than real, and that they arose chiefly from different applications of the same trinitarian hypothesis. On this foundation, much of what has passed for atheism

may be explained easily into theism. I could carry instances of my charity a great way up on this occasion, to the Ionic philosophers, ANAXIMENES and ARCHELAUS for instance, if not to ANAXIMANDER : and if THALES, the founder of this school, wants little, ANAXAGORAS, the last but one of his successors, wants no, excuse to clear him of atheism.

THE hypothesis of a trinity in the Godhead was brought from Egypt into Greece by ORPHEUS, whoever he was, and possibly by others in that remote antiquity. It is not unlikely too that this doctrine, being taught to an half savage people, who were unable to distinguish between gods in the Godhead and gods out of it, if in truth that distinction was made so early, increased and confirmed their polytheism. But the true philosophical age having begun much later in that country, when the Greeks, instead of waiting for missionaries from Egypt, went thither themselves in quest of science, this hypothesis could be little known, and less employed before that æra ; whereas it was much in use afterwards, and we find the traces of it in all that theistical philosophers taught. These traces are obscure and confused. The doctrine itself was so till PLATO appeared like the Pagan ATHANASIUS, defined the mystery, and fixed a profession of faith that lasted till the Christian ATHANASIUS altered it. Thus we may account in part for the obscurity and confusion wherein we discover  
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the traces of this doctrine. It was very obscure and confused in the minds of the philosophers themselves. No wonder then if the references to it, and the opinions derived from it, are still more so in the writings of men who have conveyed them down to us in fragments, and who understood the doctrine even less than these philosophers\*.

TULLY

\* We shall have no room to be surpris'd that the Pagan doctrine of a trinity in the Godhead was taught, and has come down to us, so confusedly, if we consider how confusedly and how darkly the fathers of the three first centuries expressed themselves on the same subject: tho' the learned bishop BULL would have made, if he could, these primitive fathers, all ad unum Athanasians, and the doctrine of the church to have been exactly that of the nicean council, long before ATHANASIUS was born, or the council was held. If this doctrine has come down to us with greater precision than that of the heathen philosophers, and in an uniformity of terms, the reason is obvious. Ancient theists applied their unsettled notions of this kind differently, and according to their different systems of philosophy: they were under no common control to enforce an uniformity of terms at least: whereas among Christians there was such a control, and men were obliged to use the same forms of words, whatever their opinions were. Their leaders indeed disputed much, and each of them formed a party: but when they met in councils, they were obliged, sometimes by art or intrigue, and sometimes by the determining influence of imperial authority, to unite in terms, and to create an appearance of uniformity. Thus the Christian doctrine of the trinity was fixed. Different councils, it is true, made different decisions; and reverend fathers,

TULLY makes VELLEIUS say that THALES  
was

thers, who had held one opinion in one council, changed it in another: there were therefore several orthodoxies pro tempore, if I may say so. But that which prevailed last has come down to us: and nothing has been neglected, not even interpolation, to make more ancient fathers hold the language of those who were more modern; an example of which I will quote from ERASMUS †. That learned, exact, and candid divine, not only acknowledges in many places, among a multitude of other defects, such as unfairness, uncharitableness, and violence, the inaccuracy of these fathers in their writings; but he complains likewise of the interpolations and alterations which have been made in them for the purpose I have mentioned. St. HILARY, for instance, who spoke sometimes of the Son of God as of a God of the same kind, or of the same nature, with his Father; which expressions however do not come up to a complete notion of consubstantiality; dared not call the Holy Ghost God, nor ascribe adoration to him; either because he is not called God expressly in scripture, or because the saint thought it more necessary to insist on the Godhead of the Son, whose human nature made it more difficult to persuade mankind that he was God; or else, finally, because the claim of the Holy Ghost had not been yet admitted in due form by councils, who erected themselves, as it were, into courts of honor to settle ranks and precedency in heaven. ERASMUS thinks that such reasons as these obliged HILARIUS to use much caution in his expressions; and therefore, speaking of the Holy Ghost, he had contented himself to say, “promerendus est:” but some orthodox interpolator added, “et adorandus.” Many other instances of corrupting the text of this writer there are, and those principally where such liberties ought to

† Ep. in HILARIUM.

was the first who enquired into such matters;  
that

have been taken the least, as in his books *De Trinitate*, and *De Synodis*; for in them, says ERASMUS, he treated very difficult and very dangerous points of divinity, “*periculosae de rebus divinis difficultates.*”

THE same artifice was employed sometimes in favor of opinions reputed heterodox, if we may believe RUFINUS, who, in defending ORIGEN against that bully JEROM, and that idiot EPIPHANIUS, insists that ORIGEN would not have been exposed to their censure if his writings had not been interpolated. But this artifice, as well as others, had a much greater, and an entire effect, when it was employed on the side of the orthodox; that is, of the majority, or of those who made themselves pass for the majority. Thus it happened in the case of the Trinity, and in many others, that Christian doctrines have been handed down with an appearance of uniformity, which pagan doctrines could not have.

BUT farther, if Christian doctrines had come down in the writings of the most ancient fathers with still less uniformity than they have, such modern fathers as bishop BULL would not have found it hard to make them appear entirely uniform. This he has attempted, in the case of the Trinity, with great applause from the ecclesiastics of your church, and from those of ours. He owns, for instance, that ORIGEN talks sometimes too freely and sceptically; that TERTULLIAN cared little what he said, provided he contradicted his adversary; and that two eggs are not more alike, than the expressions of this father to the whimsies of VALENTINIAN. He gives us LACTANTIUS for a rhetor ignorant in theology, and St. JEROM for a sophist not to be relied on much. Many of their expressions being gnostical and arian, as well as those of other fathers, they were  
not

that he asserted water to be the first principle of things,

not much in his favor; and yet, to save them for other purposes wherein their authority might be necessary, he distinguishes between witnesses of the faith and interpreters of the scriptures: he allows them to be good witnesses, and condemns them often as bad interpreters. He makes this distinction particularly when he speaks of a passage in IRENAEUS, where this father cites a passage from the prophet ISAIAH to prove the divinity of the Holy Ghost. BULL thought ORIGEN orthodox in his opinion, tho' not in his expressions, concerning the Trinity. Few of the fathers who lived before the Nicean council were so; and therefore BULL supposes them orthodox against their expressions, rather than proves them to have been so by their expressions. He does by them what they did by the scriptures, and draws them to his sense, in what terms soever they signify their own. CUDWORTH thinks these primitive fathers heterodox in opinion, as well as in expression. They must needs have been much in the wrong, since they agreed in asserting the subordination of the Son to the Father. They had taken this opinion of the Logos from the platonic philosophy, and their whole trinity was built on the plan which PLATO had made less confused than that of other heathen trinitarians. "Usque ad tres hypostases, dicit PLATO, Dei progredi essentiam; et esse quidem, dicit, Deum summe bonum; post illum autem secundum conditorem, tertium autem mundi animam."

THE absurdities and profanations built on such notions as these were innumerable. He who endeavours to consider them with attention, will find his head turn in the confusion they create, and no precise discrimination of orthodox and heterodox possible to be made between them, either

things, and God the mind who framed them all  
out

either according to reason, wherein they have no foundation at all, or to gospel revelation, wherein they have very little. They were however propagated by Pagan and Christian theology, till metaphorical generations were thought to be real, and till the virtues and operations of the one Supreme Being were assumed to be distinct hypostases or subsistences in the divinity; as the aeons of VALENTINIAN signified, I presume, no more, in the allegorical cant of the first Christian times, than virtues and affections of the divinity, which were afterwards understood to be real beings existing out of the first Being.

THESE doctrines were encouraged, perhaps introduced, by others, that traditional theology among the heathens, and cabalistical literature among the Jews, had preserved from the most ancient ages; and which, as wild as they were, had wanted neither knaves nor fools to vouch for them. These were such as supposed frequent manifestations of the Supreme Being to his creatures. According to these, he manifested himself sometimes under the form of an angel; sometimes a little, and but a little, differently under that of a man; both of which were called God whilst the manifestation lasted. That this was so, we may conclude from divers passages of the Old Testament, and from several Egyptian traditions. Thus it became in time not hard to imagine a much more noble manifestation of the Supreme Being himself, in the appearance of the Logos or the Word, under an human form, into which God had insinuated himself, and in which he remained incarnated. "*Pater in me manens facit ipse opera.*" The Word, that is the Supreme Reason, was always with God, for God alone is that Supreme Reason: but this reason spoke to mankind under the sensible image of a man, when that person appeared who was called the Son of  
God,

out of water †. **DIOGENES LAERTIUS** says that **THALES** held God to be the oldest of all the things that exist, because ungenerated or unproduced; and the world to be the most beautiful, because it was made by God §. These expressions might induce one to think that **THALES** was not only the oldest, but the most orthodox of the Greek philosophers, even more so than the divine **PLATO**; and that his doctrine may serve as an instance to confirm **TERTULIAN**'s maxim, how precarious soever it be, "*id verum quod primum.*" They might induce one to think that **THALES** intended the Supreme Being, whose sole action in the production of things other theists did not acknowledge; tho' they acknowledged his existence. But these passages, compared with others, will rather serve to shew in how confused a manner the trinitarian hypothesis led these philosophers to speak of God, and of the first efficient cause. **BAYLE**

God, on account of his miraculous birth, and most important mission. Such was the Word of **St. JOHN**; "the visible image of the invisible God." To this let us add, for the honor of humanity, and on the authority of scripture, that angels suffered themselves to be adored by men before this manifestation; but that they have declined this honor ever since the Son of God took upon him the human nature.

† **THALES**, qui primus de talibus rebus quaesivit, aquam dixit esse initium rerum : Deum autem eam mentem, quae ex aqua cuncta fingeret. **CIC.** De nat. deor. Lib. i.

§ Antiquissimum eorum omnium quae sunt, Deus ; ingenuitas enim. Pulcherrimum mundus ; a Deo enim factus est.

thought



thought the text of TULLY corrupted in the passage concerning THALES, because VELLEIUS, having said that this philosopher was the first, says immediately after that ANAXAGORAS \* was the first who taught this doctrine. There may be room for such a suspicion : and whatever interpretation be given to the passage, it will be little agreeable to the usual clearness and precision of that great author.

WHEN we consider that THALES had been instructed in the Egyptian schools, and reflect on the opinion imputed to him by STOBÆUS, that the first cause had no action, we must be persuaded that, however he spoke of mind, he did not intend the first God in the heathen trinity. He seems rather to have confounded nous and psuche, mind and soul, the second and the third god. A passage in DIOGENES LAERTIUS is very favorable to this notion ; for in that THALES is said to have held that mind, and therefore the efficient cause which had made all things out of water, was the swiftest of things, and pervaded rapidly the universe †. None of these philosophers presumed to employ the first God as the immediate active efficient cause of things. They introduced therefore into their physiological theology the second and the third gods of the

\* ANAXAGORAS, qui accepit ab ANAXIMENE disciplinam, primus omnium rerum descriptionem et modum mentis infinitæ vi ac ratione designari, et confici voluit.

† Velocissimum mens ; nam per universa discurret.

zoroastrian and orphic trinity, whom they sometimes seem to distinguish, and whom they much oftener confound.

PYTHAGORAS talked, it is said, of an immaterial unity, and a material duality; by which he pretended to signify perhaps the first principles of all things, the efficient and material causes: and yet we see how his doctrine is represented in the first book of the nature of the Gods. He was understood to have taught that God is a soul diffused through all being, and from which all human souls were taken \*. This was called “*avulsionem aetheris immortalis et divini* :” and CICERO remarks, or makes his interlocutor remark, that PYTHAGORAS did not see how by this avulsion or distraction God himself was rent and torn, “*discerpi ac dilacerari Deum* †.”

THIS Pythagorean god was very like the ethereal god of the Stoicians: and both of them signified, if my notions are right on this subject, which I do not presume to affirm, tho’ I think them as probable as any others, the third divinity in the godhead, according to the trinitarian hypothesis, which was certainly known to the Samian, and could not be unknown to the master of the portic. These theistical naturalists ima-

\* PYTHAGORAS—*censuit animum esse per naturam rerum omnem intentum et commeantem, ex quo animi nostri carperentur, &c.*

† DIOG. LAER.

gined a sort of plastic nature, as well as the atheistical naturalists; but, instead of such a one as acted blindly and necessarily, they assumed one that acted by design and choice, that is, with intelligence. This mind, or intelligent spirit, for they were often undistinguished, being infused, as it were, into all the parts of the material world, and moving and directing the whole as the human mind or soul moves and directs the human body, they conceived, the Stoics at least conceived, the material world like a great animal endued with life, sense, and intellect, according to the curious logic of ZENO, who advanced this paradox on the strength of logic, for want of any better foundation, and just as he advanced many, and might have advanced ten thousand more. But still we must not imagine that air or water, or aether or fire, or the world itself, was God in the opinion of these philosophers. No, they were theists: and their god was the divine spirit that exerted the power and energy of the father of spirits; their god was the mind or soul of their trinity, or both together. They, who looked up to the "sublime candens" of ENNIUS, invoked JUPITER, according to this poet: and who was JUPITER? not the aether, the "sublime candens," but a being every where present and almighty, the father of gods and men, the lord of all things, and who governs them with his nod\*.

\* Aspice hoc sublime candens, quem invocant omnes

As extravagant as these doctrines may appear, you must not condemn them too rashly. If ZENO lived in these days, he might justify what he taught about aether, and a divine spirit that acts in it and by it, by greater authorities than you apprehend perhaps. He might soon reconcile his opinions to those of some Christian philosophers, and shelter himself behind their orthodoxy. There are those who ascribe as much to this active, luminous, fiery aether, as ZENO did: and since he thought it, or rather called it, God, because of the divine spirit whose vehicle it was, they would soon persuade him to admit that this divine, is an incorporeal spirit, without whose immediate action upon aether, even aether itself would be incapable of producing any one of the phaenomena, and not the least operation could be performed in the whole extent of physical nature. They would persuade him to it the sooner, because by rejecting all existence, besides spirit and idea, and by making his doctrines coincide with theirs in the whole, he would deliver himself from a most absurd inconsistency, or from the trouble of defending it. I find, in one of the finest letters of SENECA\*, whose authority concerning the tenets of ZENO, the founder of the sect he had embraced, is decisive, that this

JOVEM—patrem divumque hominumque—dominatorem rerum, omnia nutu regentem—praesentem ac praepotentem Deum. CIC. De nat. deor. Lib. ii.

\* Ep. LXXXVIII.

philosopher

philosopher denied the existence of a material world, and by consequence, one would think, of his favorite aether. PARMENIDES asserted one sole substance, like SPINOZA. ZENO denied even this, says SENECA †. He could not believe his god, therefore, to be so much as clothed with aether, unless he contradicted himself: but by taking refuge among these philosophers, he might talk as if he did; he might maintain that he was so clothed, and might assume the right they assume, to talk most learnedly of all the corporeal phaenomena without believing that they exist; in short, he might reduce inconsistency itself into system. SENECA, and the whole portic, might cry out that too much subtilty does great hurt, and is injurious to truth\*: they would cry out in vain.

HAVING observed how THALES, PYTHAGORAS, and ZENO, the founders of three famous sects, reasoned about the first principles of things, I come to speak of ANAXAGORAS. Now this philosopher, like the rest, held matter to be eternal. But he differed from them in his notions concerning the efficient cause. He did not make a plastic intelligent nature of mind and spirit, confounded into one. He did not make the same of spirit alone; as he might have done,

† ——— PARMENIDI, nihil est praeter unum—ZENONI ne unum quidem.

\* Quantum mali faciat nimia subtilitas, et quam infesta veritati sit. Ib.

since this spirit being divine, and even a third god, according to ancient traditions, could want no intelligence. He did not mingle up both or either of these with matter, to constitute a soul of the world. He advanced a much more rational hypothesis than any of those who went before, or who came after him. DIODEGENES LAERTIUS has preserved the summary of it in his own words. He was the first, says this biographer, who added mind to matter, that is, he added it in a manner that neither THALES, nor any of the Greek philosophers, had imagined before him; for he writes thus in the beginning of his work: "All things were blended together, when mind came and put them into order †, accessit mens." Mind then was no part of them, no plastic nature working in them. Mind, the first efficient cause, was distinct from them, and extrinsic to them. I determine not, whether ANAXAGORAS meant by mind the Supreme Being in his unity, without any regard to the hypothesis of a trinity; or whether he assumed distinctly the second god of this trinity, whilst others assumed the third only, or confounded the second with the third in their notions of a first efficient cause. In all cases he was a more reasonable theist, and especially if he ascribed the production, order, and government, of the universe to the one, whom others considered only as

† *Primus hic materiae mentem adjecit, in principio operis—sic scribens: Omnia simul erant, deinde accessit mens, eaque composuit.*

the first, god; which I incline to think was his meaning.

BUT to what purpose do I comment on this passage, when the doctrine of ANAXAGORAS concerning a first efficient cause is so fully mentioned by ARISTOTLE and PLUTARCH? The former of these was much more inclined to censure, than to approve, the opinions of other philosophers: and yet ANAXAGORAS extorted his approbation, on this occasion at least, how much soever their opinions might differ on others. He who taught that mind or intellect was the efficient cause of the world, and of all order in it, appeared like a man of good sense, “quasi sobrius,” in comparison with the former naturalists, who were a set of vain babblers, “vana dicentes,” says ARISTOTLE\*: and he adds, we know that this man was ANAXAGORAS. The same philosopher, in another place †, lets us farther into this doctrine; for he says there, that according to it this mind, the first principle or efficient cause, was simple and unmixed; and that ANAXAGORAS ascribed to it both knowledge and the beginning of motion §. PLUTARCH goes

\* ARIST. Metaph. Lib. i.

† ARIST. De anima, Lib. i.

§ — Simplicem, et non mistam, et puram esse, simpliciter dixit. Atque eidem principio haec utraque tribuit, cognitionem — et motum, dicens, universum mentem movisse.

farther ||, for he contrasts the doctrine of ANAXAGORAS, who held that matter was motionless till God gave it motion as well as order, with that of PLATO, who held that matter was in a disorderly motion, and that God did nothing more than direct this motion, so as to bring order out of confusion. This is the substance of the passage: and surely the ionic philosopher came nearer to orthodoxy in this case, than the divine PLATO, tho' such a platonic madman as poor DACIER may not scruple to assert, and to believe piously, that according to PLATO motion was imprinted on matter by the same spirit who created matter\*.

It was objected to ANAXAGORAS by ARISTOTLE, and by several Christian writers, that altho' he acknowledged a Supreme Mind to be the efficient cause of all things, yet he had never recourse to it when he could account for the phaenomena without it: that he used the divine intellect as a machine to remove difficulties, otherwise insuperable, out of the way†; but in every other case he chose rather to insist on natural causes §, than to argue from the principles

|| PLUT. De placit. phil. Lib. i. c. 7.

\* Il a été imprimé à la matiere par le même esprit qui l'a créée. La doctrine de PLATON.

† ——— Tanquam machina utitur intellectu, etc. ARIST.

§ — Magis caetera omnia, quam intellectum, causam eorum quae sunt, ponit. ARIST.



of † mind and reason. All this now means no more, than that he neither mingled logic like ARISTOTLE, nor theology like PLATO, with his physics: and the objection is not only absurd in itself, but so much the more so, because the methods of enquiring into nature, implied in it and opposed to that of ANAXAGORAS, are infinitely absurd. I acknowledge, might ANAXAGORAS say, a supreme mind, that disposed and ordered the whole frame of the universe, that gave it motion and set the great machine a going under the influence and direction of second causes, which proceed and work effects according to the original impressions that divine wisdom and power made uniformly on all matter, or differently on the different elements of it. These original impressions, which proceed from the inconceivable energy of the first efficient cause, and this order of second causes which proceeds from them, I call laws of nature. Knowledge of the first is wholly unattainable. I presume therefore to speak seldom of it, and always hypothetically. Knowledge of the second may be attained in some degree by observation and experiment, and by no other means. By these we may rise a little way from particular to general and more general causes: and within these bounds I confine my physical researches.

IF ANAXAGORAS held this discourse, whatever cavils might be made by atomic or other

† — Ex mentis rationisque regula—EUSEB.

philosophers to some of the terms he employed, we should be obliged to confess that he talked very rationally. Logic came into mode after his time. But logic, to speak like my lord BACON, cannot reach the subtilty of nature; and, by catching at what it cannot hold, serves rather to establish and fix error, than to open the way to truth. I may say too after men of the greatest name in philosophy, what it would become me ill to pronounce on my own authority, that ARISTOTLE rendered himself as ridiculous by applying logic to natural philosophy, as DES CARTES rendered himself estimable by the application of geometry to it. As to theology, they who abuse it by mixing it with physics, any farther than ANAXAGORAS did, degrade the Supreme Being in their ideas, and lead men back towards polytheism, or to something very like it at least. Which is the less pardonable, because it is done wantonly, as it were, and without any apparent motive but impertinent curiosity, or as impertinent vanity. They are unable to conceive how body can act at all, and therefore they suppose the immediate presence and action of an incorporeal agent in every operation of corporeal nature. But to what purpose? Aether it is said, that pure invisible active fire, permeates the hardest bodies; or gravitation or attraction intercedes all body, even the “*minima naturae*.” Is not this now to ascend high enough in the series of second causes? Or if we cannot conceive how aether performs of itself, and without any concurrent cause, the  
 operations,

operations, and produces the effects, which chemists ascribe to it, do we hope to discover how mind acts on aether, or concurrently with it? Will any man, who is in his senses, expect to discover what those original impressions are, or how they were given by the supreme mind, which determine aether in this manner, and make it the sensible cause of these effects? I think not. They who believe that the Newtonian attraction is no original nor universal property of matter, will do extremely well to attempt the improvement of this system, by discovering the physical or metaphysical cause of it. They who believe it such a property will enquire no farther, nor agitate their minds, nor beat their brains, to discover the cause, and in hope to determine how this property was impressed originally on matter. A Leibnitzian, who does not believe any such original universal property, nor any thing more than a new phaenomenon to have been discovered, should consequentially attempt the improvement I have just mentioned. But I think he would rather attempt to demolish by logic, what has been erected on experiment and geometry, without being able to substitute any thing so good in the room of it. He would require of the Newtonian to give him the sufficient reason of such a property in matter. He would retire from the visible corporeal world to the intellectual world of ideas, and endeavour to make the enquiry, that he could carry on no farther in physics, end in metaphysics. The Newtonian, if he

was

was wise, would refuse to follow him, lest the enquiry should end, after much labor of abstract meditation, as oddly as that of LEIBNITZ did, when he could find the sufficient reason of extension in nothing better than non-extended substances, in those simple beings his monades.

As it is unreasonable to indulge the foolish desire of knowing, or the impertinent desire of appearing to know, beyond the reach and comprehension of our very limited faculties in all cases, so it is particularly both profane, and injurious to true theism, to assume the immediate presence and action of the Supreme Being in all the operations of corporeal nature; however the assumption may be palliated by metaphysical distinctions, and how innocent soever the intentions of those who make it may be. They who do this, do in effect reduce God in their ideas, notwithstanding all the magnificent expressions which they employ, to be a sort of plastic intelligent nature, working constantly on matter, if not in it. The notion is much the same with that which the Pagans entertained. It is only less reverential to the Supreme Being than theirs was. They gave this employment to a third God, who was in that hypothesis the second link in that chain of being that reached down from God to man. These Christian philosophers and divines give it to the Supreme Being himself; for they profess that they adore this Being in his unity, and have no other God but him. We  
are

are forced to help our conceptions of the divine nature by images taken from human nature, and the imperfections of this nature are our excuse. But then we must take care not to make humanity the measure of divinity, and much more not to make the last the least of the two. When we have raised our idea of any human excellency as high as we are able, it remains a very limited idea. When we apply it to God, we must add to it therefore our negative idea, or our notion of infinity ; that is, we must not confine it by the same, nor suppose it confined by any limitations whatever. Thus when we speak of the world as the work of God, we must not conceive it to have been made by a laborious progression, and to have remained at last imperfect like the works of men. We must conceive on the contrary, as well as we can, that God willed it to exist, and it existed ; that he wills it to continue, and it continues, distinct from the workman, like any human work, and infinitely better fitted by the contrivance and disposition of it to answer all the purposes of the divine architect, without his immediate and continual interposition. To think otherwise is to measure divinity by a more scanty measure than humanity ; and, because we cannot conceive how the operations of this vast machine are performed, to account for them by supposing it, in this instance, less perfect than a machine of human execution. Carry a clock to the wild inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope ; they will soon be convinced that intelligence made it :  
and

and none but the most stupid will imagine that this intelligence is in the hand that they see move, and in the wheels that they see turn. Those among them, who pretend to greater sagacity than the rest, may perhaps suspect that the workman is concealed in the clock, and there conducts invisibly all the motions of it. The first of these Hottentot philosophers are, you see, more rational than atheists; the second are more so than the Heathen naturalists; and the third are just at a pitch with some modern metaphysicians.

THE same objection was pushed by PLATO against ANAXAGORAS on this farther consideration, that, by insisting on second causes alone, he neglected the contemplation of final causes, and to “penetrate the designs of that Supreme Spirit who governs the world; whilst SOCRATES undertook to explain all nature by the “fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, and rather “to give men great views, and to elevate their “minds, than to instruct them in natural philosophy\*.” I have touched this subject, I believe, already in part, and enough to shew, after my lord BACON, that the method ANAXAGORAS took, and our modern philosophers have pursued with so much honor to themselves, and so much benefit to mankind, tended to the advancement of real knowledge; whereas the contrary method tended to obstruct, and did really

\* DACIER on the doctrine of PLATO.

obstruct it. But in this place, and without repeating what has been said before, I must examine the objection in another view, and shew by a comparison of the two methods, that SOCRATES and PLATO, who were in all things the same, as PLUTARCH says\*, substituted phantastic in lieu of real knowledge, and corrupted science to the very source; that of the first philosophy in a particular manner, and by such assumptions, and such a method of reasoning, as continue the taint to this day.

THEY discovered a first intelligent cause, as ANAXAGORAS had done, à posteriori, that is, by the only true way by which we are able to make this discovery. The reflections which SOCRATES made on the creatures, as we learn from XENOPHON†, demonstrated to him that the Creator of the world was not chance. It might have been expected from the character of SOCRATES, that he would have confined his speculations to the same principle of reasoning, or have controlled them by it. But he did the contrary. XENOPHON, who took minutes of his discourses, accused PLATO of corrupting the doctrine of their common master; and DIOGENES LAERTIUS says that PLATO ascribed to him many things which he never taught. This writer quotes for it even the authority of SOCRATES himself; for he relates that when this philoso-

\* De placit. phil.

† De memorab.

pher heard the *Lyfis* read, he cried out, “ Oh *HERCULES* ! how many things does this young “ man feign of me ? ” But notwithstanding thefe testimonies, and without entering into the quarrel between *XENOPHON* and *PLATO*, like *GELLIUS*, *ATHENAEUS*, and others, it would be eafy to prove by feveral authorities, and even by that of *XENOPHON*, that if *SOCRATES* did not fay all that *PLATO* made him fay, yet he advanced many points of doctrine much more improper to be fubjects of enquiry, than many which he forbid to be made fuch. In fhort, tho’ he is faid to have drawn philofophy from the clouds, and tho’ he did in fact prefer the ftudy of morality to that of physics, yet he mounted to the clouds himfelf, and loft himfelf in them. How could he do otherwife, when he declared that the two offices of philofophy are the contemplation of God, and the abftraction of the foul from corporeal fenfe \* ? Men, who are pre-fumptuous and mad enough to think themfelves capable of fuch contemplation, and fuch abftraction, may well begin their enquiries out of the bounds of human knowledge : and they who do fo, run a great rifque of getting never into them. Such were thefe famous philofophers : and that you may the better comprehend their method, I choofe to fet it before you in the light in which it ftands in the *Phaedo*. You will fee it there, and perhaps it is the only thing

\* *STANLEY* from *PLATO*.



worth observing in the whole dialogue, with this advantage, that the method of reasoning *à priori* is contrasted with that of reasoning *à posteriori*.

IN the account which PHAEDO gives of the discourse SOCRATES held, immediately before his death, concerning the immortality of the soul, two objections that were made to him are mentioned. It was objected that the soul, being nothing more than a kind of harmony resulting from the composition of the body, instead of lasting longer than the body, must decay with it, and even perish before it. In the next place, the soul having been compared to a taylor, who makes himself several suits of clothes, and wears them out one after another, the objector urges that she may wear out herself at last by the fatigue of going through so many generations, and perish with one body, tho' she has out-lived many. Such weighty objections threw the auditors, who had been convinced before by the no less weighty arguments of SOCRATES, into doubt and perplexity. SOCRATES felt none, as you will believe of course: and PHAEDO proceeds to relate how he continued the disputation, how he convinced CEBES, one of the objectors, and how he left SIMONIAS, the other, without a reply. In order to do this the more effectually, he thinks it necessary to consider the causes of generation and corruption: and he says on that occasion that he had been desirous in his youth to

study

study physics, or the history of nature, as he calls this science. Now the more he studied nature that he might discover the causes of generation and corruption, and the constitution of human bodies, the more blind and the more ignorant it seems he grew: and this we shall believe the more easily still, if we consider how superficially his scholar talks, and how grossly he blunders too, whenever he touches these subjects, which he affects to treat as matters of amusement rather than of serious application. SOCRATES became acquainted with second causes and effects in the course of this study; but he could go no higher: and he remained much dissatisfied with such imperfect knowledge. He was therefore extremely rejoiced when he fell by accident on the works of ANAXAGORAS; for, that philosopher teaching that mind or intelligence had disposed and ordered, and was the cause of all things, he expected to find in those writings the sufficient reason of LEIBNITZ, not only how, but why, this mind or intelligence had disposed and ordered every thing, why every thing is as it is through the whole extent of nature. But he was again wonderfully disappointed. ANAXAGORAS proceeded on observation and experiment, such as he was able to make, to consider how second causes work in the corporeal system, and the production of the phaenomena, under the direction, and by the energy of the first. But he presumed not to go up to the first, to discover how this direction was given, how this energy was communicated, nor, in

## Essay 2. PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS.

a word, what the designs, the reasons, and the ends of the divine architect were. SOCRATES therefore, who aimed at nothing less than knowledge of this kind, despised ANAXAGORAS; and, considering what he had a mind to know without any regard to the means he had of knowing, he despised physics, and resorted to metaphysics. There he and his scholar found the immaterial forms of things, eternal ideas, and incorporeal substances; by which if you should ask me what I understand him to have meant, I should be obliged in conscience to answer you as honest CEBES answered SOCRATES, *per Jovem haud multum*. Whatever they are, they exist in the divine intellect. There we may, and there we ought to contemplate them; for the Logos, or second God, in the platonic trinity was an assemblage, a congeries, as CUDWORTH calls him, of beings crowded into one, the place of ideas in the platonism of MALBRANCHE, and the same thing to the soul, as the soul is to the body: for so we must understand an expositor and translator of PLATO, or deny him any meaning at all\*.

If you would know how SOCRATES pursues this sublime metaphysical method of investigating nature, you may please to imagine ANAXAGORAS and him in your garden, and yourself sauntering between them. You admire the beauty and smell of one of your flowers, and you ask

\* DACIER *Arg. du Phédon*.

the philosophers, what makes it so fine and so sweet? The first talks to you of the figure of the flower, of the variety of colors which set off one another, and the several tints which run into one another, and beget a pleasing confusion. He talks to you of the different strainers through which the sap is filtered, and of the great alterations that he has observed to be wrought to the taste, as well as to the sight and smell, in fruits as well as flowers, by this operation of nature. But he owns very frankly that his knowledge extends no further, and that he cannot so much as guess at the inward constitutions, and the real essences of substances. SOCRATES asks ANAXAGORAS, whether his senses do not deceive him, when they give him ideas that are not full, nor true, representations of the outward objects? Whether he does not perceive that sensible objects are always in a flux, and never exist; whereas intellectual objects are permanent, and exist always? Whether he can pretend therefore to have any thing more, than opinion, about the former; and whether the latter alone are not objects of knowledge? Whether the intellectual contemplation of these is not disturbed by the impressions of the other; and whether we are not kept from knowledge by taking opinion for it? Such questions as these, and many more, we may suppose that SOCRATES would ask, according to his usual style, in reply to the Ionic philosopher: after which he would bid you shut your eyes, and stop your nose, if you are curious to know why the flower

is

is fine and sweet. He would bid you raise your thoughts by intense meditation, and an abstraction from all particulars, up to the immaterial forms, the first fine, and the first sweet. It is by them, he would say, that this flower becomes fine and sweet, just as a thing is big by bigness, or little by littleness, just as one is one by the participation of unity, and two are two by the participation of duality.

IF, in the course of your conversation, it should turn on moral subjects, the same method of reasoning would be applied even to them. Should you ask ANAXAGORAS what goodness is or justice? He might bid you perhaps turn your eyes inward first, then survey mankind, observe the wants of individuals, the benefits of society, and from these particulars frame the general notions of goodness and justice. He might go a step further, and add, this is human goodness and human justice, such as we can comprehend, such as we can exercise, and such as the Supreme Mind has made it both our duty and our interest to exercise, by the constitution of the human system, and by the relations which arise in it; from all which our notions of goodness and justice result, and are compounded. Of divine goodness and divine justice, might this philosopher conclude, I am unable to frame any adequate notions; and instead of conceiving such distinct moral attributes in the Supreme Being, we ought perhaps to conceive nothing more than this, that there are

various applications of one eternal reason, which it becomes us little to analyse into attributes.

THE language of SOCRATES would be very opposite to this. He would bid you turn your eyes from the moral, as well as the physical, world to the intellectual, nor aim at knowledge where it is not to be had, but seek it where it is alone to be had. He would bid you disengage your soul from the incumberment of your body by purification and intense meditation, rise from sense to pure intellect, and, despising the low drudgery that the acquisition of particular opinions requires, aspire to nothing less than general knowledge, a knowledge of the immaterial forms of things, which are antecedent to actual existence, a knowledge which may be obtained in part now, and which will be complete hereafter. He would proceed and insist, for this is the express doctrine of the *Phaedo*, that when you have once mounted up to these eternal, independent, and unalterable ideas, you should make them the foundations or first principles of all your reasoning; and receive as true, or reject as false, whatever you observe to be agreeable, or repugnant to them. Thus you would become able to imitate God in the exercise of goodness, justice, and every other moral virtue; since his and your ideas of these virtues would be taken from the same originals: and SOCRATES might the better conjure you, as he conjured his auditors in the prison, to make yourself as like as possible

possible to your great exemplar, the Supreme Being.

I THINK you are not extremely conversant in the works of PLATO: and you may suspect therefore that I aggravate the impertinence of his doctrines. But the truth is, that as I have made ANAXAGORAS say nothing more than what he would, or might, have said, conformably to his manner of philosophising; so I have made SOCRATES advance nothing which the Phædo in particular, as well as PLATO's writings in general, will not vouch. But since I have brought this rambling essay down to the founder of the academy, it is necessary that something more should be said about him and his philosophy; for his appearance, and the institution of his school make a most remarkable epocha in the history of the first philosophy: so remarkable, and so necessary to be well surveyed, that we cannot otherwise discern the true origin of the first philosophy, and the theology which prevails at this hour in our own country, and among all the nations of the west.

## S E C T. VIII.

**S**IGNS, symbols, sacerdotal letters, sacred dialects, and hieroglyphics, were employed by the Egyptian and Eastern nations, to preserve and to perpetuate their knowledge. Strange means indeed! For how imperfectly, how dark-

ly, how uncertainly must this knowledge have been conveyed both to, and from, the Greek philosophers? What precision or clearness can we imagine, for instance, that DEMOCRITUS could find in those ethics which he is said to have transcribed from the columns of ACICARUS in Babylonia? These monuments of Egyptian and Eastern philosophy were explained, it may be said, to DEMOCRITUS, and to the other Greeks, who went into those countries for instruction in every part of science, by the brachmans, the magi, the gymnosophists, and the Egyptian priests, into whose colleges they were admitted, and into whose rites they were initiated. I believe that this was so. I believe that the Egyptian and Eastern masters explained and commented the hieroglyphical or sacerdotal text to their Grecian scholars: and I believe further, that the scholars set up for masters soon. The philosophy they had learned, marvellous and mystic, suited their genius extremely, and was particularly adapted to their humour, in ages when every man, who had pretensions of this kind, affected to institute a new sect, or to distinguish himself at least by some new hypothesis. But what was the effect of all this? Did they become more intelligible than their masters, or was their knowledge more real? We have in our hands the book JAMBlichus wrote in answer to the questions which PORPHYRY had asked. JAMBlichus wrote long after the times we speak of here; but his sum of theology and theurgic knowledge was extracted from



from Assyrian and Chaldean memorials, from the columns of the first **MERCURY**, and from books that contained all the doctrines of the ancients concerning matters of a divine nature, which were probably the books of the second **MERCURY**, or such as went under his name; in short, from the same sources from whence the Greeks had so many centuries before derived their knowledge real and pretended. Was it grown more clear? Was it not in **JAMBlichus**, and in all the Greek philosophers, who mingled up their own conceits with those of their Egyptian and Eastern masters, as unintelligible in jargon, as the original of it all could be in hieroglyphics or sacerdotal letters.

SUCH we may conclude was the first philosophy among the Greeks, from the beginning of their philosophical aera, which we date no higher than **PERECYDES** of Syros, and **THALES**; dark in its original, and rendered more dark, and more confused, by men, who grafted incessantly one degree of phantastical knowledge on another, and who, for want of any criterion to fix their opinions, wandered into every hypothesis which their warm imaginations, overheated by those of Egypt and the East, could suggest to them.

IN the midst of this darkness and confusion **PLATO** arose, about two centuries after the commencement that has been set of the philosophical aera. If he dispelled any of this darkness, it

was by introducing a false light into the first philosophy, that led men oftener out of the way of truth, than into it: and as to the confusion, which vague notions and systems of mere imagination necessarily produce, there was never any greater than that which arose in metaphysics and theology, after platonism began to be dogmatically taught in the school of Alexandria, and in those of Christianity.

THIS philosopher availed himself of all the phantastical science that was then in vogue. He went into Egypt: he heard CRATYLUS, a scholar of HERACLITUS: he had a philosophical correspondence with ARCHYTAS: and, that he might improve himself the more in Pythagorean doctrines, he went into Italy, and conversed with the principal men of that broken sect. He was a follower and a scholar of SOCRATES from his youth. Neither SOCRATES, nor he, had any great claim to the honor of being first inventors or teachers in any part of science. That the master reduced speculation to action we cannot doubt: and TULLY, in his Academical questions, describes him pompously as the first who called philosophy off from objects which are placed by nature beyond our reach, and which had employed all the philosophers before him, to the business and duty of common life, and to the consideration of virtue and vice, of good and evil. But public and private morality, and all the rules of good government, to say it by the way, had been taught,

long

long before SOCRATES, by SOLON and the other sages of Greece; and if we compare the success of his mission at Athens with that of PYTHAGORAS at Crotona, as it is represented by JUSTIN\*, we shall find no reason to think him either the first or the greatest missionary of natural religion. Sure it is that he devoted himself to this work with much sincerity, perseverance, and zeal; and was the martyr of a much purer doctrine than many a modern missionary has died for teaching. All we are to understand, therefore, by what is mentioned above, seems to be this, that he confined his lessons of philosophy to ethics: and even this cannot be true, if his lessons were such as PLATO represents them. I cannot help thinking that TULLY was more attached to SOCRATES on account of his academical, than his moral, character.

THERE was a greater simplicity, no doubt, in his manner of teaching, than in that of PLATO, and in the doctrines too, very probably, that he taught. When questions were asked him about another world, he answered, with much simplicity, that he had never been there, nor had ever seen any one who came from thence. PLATO pretended to know more of the matter, and to have his knowledge from one who had been there, and whom the infernal judges had sent to reveal what he had seen and heard. This idle tale was taken probably from the magi, or the

\* Lib. xx.

Chaldeans, if this ERUS ARMENIUS, mentioned in the tenth book of his Politics, was one of the ZOROASTERS : and as idle as it is, it got into history, and has been recorded gravely among other stories of extraordinary events\*. But tho' the doctrines, as well as the manners, of SOCRATES were more simple than those of PLATO; yet we know from PLUTARCH, and even by the discourses which XENOPHON, as well as PLATO, ascribes to him, that he entertained and propagated many of those theological and metaphysical notions, which are not, most certainly, parts of natural theology; because they cannot be necessarily deduced from any knowledge that we have of nature.

METAPHYSICS may be said to have succeeded mythology and physics in Greece about this time, tho' the name was not invented till long after. PHERECYDES, PYTHAGORAS, and PARMENIDES made strong pretensions to a science of this sort. But the first and the last founded no sect; and that of the other was soon dispersed and extinguished: tho' DIOGENES LAERTIUS says, by mistake doubtless, that it continued eighteen generations. The writings of these philosophers being soon lost, nor any set of men remaining long to preserve a body of their doctrines, PLATO and ARISTOTLE had an opportunity of decking themselves in their plumes, and of com-

\* VAL. MAX. Lib. i. MACROB. Somn. SCIP.

ing down to posterity as originals on this and other subjects, on which they were far from being such.

THE fables and the superstitious notions that prevailed among the vulgar of all ranks, in the days of polytheism, about their gods, became soon too gross to satisfy those who began in every country to emerge out of ignorance, and to cultivate and improve their reason. In vain did the philosophers and priests endeavour to soften them to such men as these, by all the mystery of their mysteries, into which SOCRATES would never submit to be initiated; that is, by their secret doctrine. Not only the unity of the Supreme Being, but the absurdity of supposing him to exist a system of matter like other material beings, was discovered, and the notion of a spiritual substance was established. Whether this notion was entertained first of the Supreme Being, and was applied afterwards to the human soul; whether it was entertained first of the human soul, and was applied afterwards to the Supreme Being; or whether the idea of spirit and spiritual substance was determined exactly either by ancient philosophers, or by Christian fathers, as we have determined ours, if even ours is as much determined as we suppose it to be, I shall not enquire at this time. All I mean to observe is, that an intellectual world of subordinate and of created gods, of demons, of souls, and other spiritual inhabitants, being once assumed, as it

was together with the unity of God, if that which is demonstrated may be said in any sense or on any occasion to be assumed, the philosophers did much the same thing in a metaphysical, as they and the priests had done in a mythological, way. They made as many spiritual beings as they wanted, and they generated them as they could. The head of JUPITER opened, and PALLAS the goddess of wisdom came out of it, according to the mythologists. This image was too gross, and the fable too impertinent, to be retained. PLATO therefore refined metaphysically upon it, and supposed, for in him it was mere supposition, a second god, the Logos, the Word, the wisdom of the first, an emanation proceeding from the first. When this metaphysical generation by emanation was once established in opinion, metaphysics peopled Heaven as fast, as ever physics, by the help of mythology, had done: and it is impossible to consider without astonishment, how these spiritual beings were multiplied from age to age, by Pythagorean and Platonic philosophers, by Jewish cabalists, and by Christian divines, both orthodox and heretical. A new jargon grew up to express these chimerical notions, and very often to express things of which the learned in those days, as in ours, had not themselves any notion at all. Expansions and diffusions of the most excellent nature, which PYTHAGORAS had learned from the Zoroastrian theology to be a pure and perfect light, and which some of the Greek philosophers called

called an intelligent fire; processions, profusions, and extensions of the first simple substance, superior lights in the world of emanations, called sephiroth by the Jews, aeons male and female, supersubstantial and substantial beings, numbers, ideas, words, forms, souls that inhabit in Heaven and in the stars; all these terms were used, I say, till they passed for terms of a real science. Thus metaphysics constituted a sort of polytheism, as mythology had done before: and to shew you how little advantage these refined doctrines had over the other, I will bring an instance which I find in Mr. SELDEN, and which is plainly an ingraftment on the metaphysical doctrines of PYTHAGORAS and PLATO; tho' it be of a later date, as it must needs be, since it is taken from the Jews, who had most probably no knowledge of Chaldaic philosophy till they went into captivity, nor of Greek philosophy till after the expedition of ALEXANDER. Nothing appeared more shocking in all the Pagan mythology, than the carnal copulations of gods and goddesses with one another and with mortals, than their adulteries and their rapes, than gods begetting children, and goddesses lying-in: and yet we may see by a passage of PLUTARCH, in the life of NUMA POMPILIUS, that these opinions were not only entertained by the vulgar, but were matters of gave speculation and of theological dispute, as much as the incarnation of the Word has been among Christians: for he says that the Egyptian doctors made this distinction: they held that a  
god

god might get a woman with child, but that a man could have no carnal commerce with a goddess. Now these copulations were carried on between souls in the spiritual world, according to the cabalists, those famous interpreters of Jewish theology, tho' in a more decent manner, and in lawful marriage, as we learn from SELDEN\*. "The cabalists, he says, assert, that "as a soul descends from Heaven into the embryo of every man, so a new soul is sent from "above into every proselyte of justice; that "which he had whilst he was a Pagan either vanishing or returning." This new demand of souls, you see, required a new supply: and these ingenious metaphysicians soon found one that was more than sufficient. They imagined four palaces in Heaven, where the souls of innumerable holy women are married to the souls of holy men; "and, they add, that as in marriages "here on earth, bodies copulate with bodies, "so, in those celestial marriages, souls copulate "with souls, light with light†." Would not this sample of cabalistical knowledge make any learned divine grieve that the seventy books of this kind, which ESDRAS had collected for the use of wise men, are lost?

\* De jure naturae et gen. juxta discip. Ebraeor. Lib. ii. cap. 4.

† Addunt ut in conjugiiis hujus mundi, seu terrestribus, corpora corporibus conjunguntur, ita in alterius illius, seu coelestibus conjugiiis, esse conjunctionem animarum cum animabus, luminis cum lumine.



METAPHYSICS not only succeeded physics and mythology in the manner here observed, and became as great a fund of superstition, but they were carried still farther, and corrupted all real knowledge, as well as retarded the progress of it. Metaphysicians have not been quite agreed about the nature and object of their supposed science. Those we have last mentioned may be called and distinguished by the title, if they like it, of pneumatic philosophers, since their object is spirit and spiritual substances; how ridiculous soever it be to imagine spirit less an object of natural philosophy, than body. Those we are about to mention may be decorated with a Greek name likewise, and be called ontologists or ontosophists; since their object is, being in the abstract, *ens quatenus ens*. But the name that suits best all the parts of metaphysics, is that of the preternatural science; because it is synonymous to chimerical science. Who, indeed, but the author of nature, can see and know to the utmost extent of it? And who, that is not delirious, therefore, can presume to see and know beyond it? What principles can be laid, or how can any be laid, of a science that is supposed to be a first and universal science, and to contain the principles of all others, which are to be deduced from it? One might think that nothing can shew so marvellously the wanderings of the human mind, and the prevalence of imagination over all the rational faculties, as this inveterate habit  
of

of dogmatizing about spirit and spiritual substances, and even about God, the father of spirits. But there is something still more absurd in the other part of metaphysics. In this the foundations are laid in knowledge : foundations narrow, and in no degree proportionable to the hypotheses raised upon them ; but knowledge so real that it is intuitive, the knowledge that they have of their own spirits, minds, or souls, in a word, of their own intellectual powers. In the other, the foundations are laid in a supposition which we know, or may know, intuitively, to be false ; for we may be as certain that the human mind cannot make the abstractions these philosophers pretend to make, as we are certain that we can walk or run, but cannot fly : and yet this whole branch of philosophy is built on the supposition that the human mind can and does make them. Such were the numbers of PYTHAGORAS, if we know what they were : such were the ideas of PLATO, and such is that phantastic science which perverts the whole order of real science, by pretending to descend from scientific and axiomatical, down to particular, knowledge, and from universals to singularity ; instead of attempting, conformably to nature and reason, the very reverse of this.

THE supposed abstract ideas, whether simple or complex, were wrought up, by warm imaginations, into eternal essences, incorporeal substances, independent and divine beings that re-  
sided

sided in, or with, the Supreme Intellect; and this may be properly called the first apotheosis of folly\*; for the same men soon imagined a second. The second was that of the human mind or soul. The human mind or soul was of divine original, according to PYTHAGORAS and PLATO, and returned back to the soul of the universe when it left the body; to that soul which is of the same kind and nature, “ad id quod ejusdem generis et naturae est †.” Now the soul contracting much impurity in it’s descent into the body, and whilst it continues in that prison, these philosophers taught that transmigrations of the soul through several bodies served not only as some degree of punishment, but likewise to purge it from these pollutions: and this was the famous doctrine of a metempsychosis, at least of PLATO’S: for between his and that of PYTHAGORAS there seems to have been some difference. In one respect the difference is obvious enough. The metempsychosis of PYTHAGORAS was, I think, general, and that of PLATO not. PLATO classed souls, at their going out of the bodies they had informed, into three sorts, the incurable, the curable, and the pure. The first went to the devil, as we should speak, at once. Transmigration served the purpose of the second just as well as your purgatory, and prepared them to ascend to their ancient habitations “in domesticas quasi . . . sedes ‡.” The

\* Stultitiae apotheosis. BACON.

† PLATO.

‡ PHOTIUS.

last having been purified before death, wanted no purification after it. For this reason it was, that the philosophy we refer to inculcated so much the necessity of abstracting the soul from matter, and of dying, during life, a philosophical death \*; the consequence of which was regeneration, being born anew, and putting off the old man, to speak in Christian phrase. Thus the soul might be accustomed to contemplate in pure intellect, abstract forms, and eternal essences; to retain or to recover by reminiscence it's former knowledge of real beings, *vere entium* †. to rise to that super-celestial place, and the field of truth, where souls feed on divine ideas ‡. By such excursions as these, not unlike to those that are so ingeniously feigned in the World of DES CARTES §, the soul may know all things intuitively, like God, in this world, and become God in another.

“ ubi deposito conscendes corpore coelum  
Immortalis eris divus ||.”

EMPEDOCLES imagined his soul to be so pure, that a god might be said to dwell in him; and on that account called himself a god, “ seipsum

\* JAMBlichus.

† Ibid.

‡ In locum supracoelestem, inque campum veritatis . . . .  
elevatas, divinis ideis pasci. PHOT.

§ Le monde de DES CARTES, a critical satire on the Cartesian philosophy, by father DANIEL, the jesuit.

|| Carm. aurea.

“ appel-

“appellavit deum\*.” PLATO softened this by adding modestly, “quantum licet homini,” as much as a man may be so: but that great pneumatic philosopher ATHANASIUS was bolder than PLATO, if he said, what I have seen somewhere quoted from his writings, that by a participation of the same spirit we are united to the Deity †.

## S E C T. IX.

UPON the whole we may venture to pronounce, that metaphysicians have always proceeded on a false supposition, by neglecting the real phaenomena of the human mind, and by ascribing to it an imaginary power. We may venture to say, that their principles became profane and impious, when they deified their own ideas by the first apotheosis I have mentioned; and that they terminated in blasphemy, enthusiasm, and madness, when they deified their own souls by the second. Such philosophy as this, however, suited extremely well the genius, and, if I mistake not, the design of PLATO. He was much more a poetical philosopher than HOMER was a philosophical poet: and he had the worst grace imaginable when he banished the latter out of his Utopia, whose writings, with no more help than his own require to fix the allegorical and mystical senses, would have done just as

\* SECT. EMPIRIC. adv. MATH.

† Participazione spiritus conjungimur Deitati.

much good in his whimsical republic. If HOMER has done no good, he has done no lasting hurt, to philosophy; whereas PLATO, and his scholar ARISTOTLE, did not only impose much error, but diverted men from the pursuit of truth: and this they did, not only in their own age, but have continued to do it at several periods, and in several degrees, down to ours. PLATO treated every subject, whether corporeal or intellectual, like a bombast poet, and a mad theologian\*, “per ambages Deorumque ministeria:” ARISTOTLE, like an ontosophist and dialectician, with all the cavil † of words and captious disputation, which serve to nothing more, nor better, than to exercise a vain and trifling subtilty of wit, and to prove equally well, for instance, that § mice gnaw, or do not gnaw, cheese; which is an example that SENECA brings, by way of ridicule, on such philosophers as these, and which might have been applied very strongly to ZENO, the founder of his sect, to CHRYSIPPUS, and all the heroes of the portic. But I choose to confirm what I advance concerning the characters of these two philosophers, in better

\* Tumidus poeta, theologus mente captus. BACON De interp. nat.

† . . . Verborum cavillatio . . . et captiosae disputationes, quae acumen irritum exercent. SEN. ep. XLV.

§ Mus syllaba est: mus autem caseum rodit: syllaba ergo caseum rodit. Mus syllaba est: syllaba autem caseum non rodit: mus ergo caseum non rodit. Ibid. ep XLVIII.

words and on a better authority than my own. My lord BACON observes, that almost all the ancient naturalists, such as EMPEDOCLES, ANAXAGORAS, ANAXIMENES, HERACLITUS, and DEMOCRITUS, subjected mind to things \*. That is, they never lost sight of the phaenomena of the visible world, but made them the rule, as well as object, of their enquiries: and what is said about this object of physics, the corporeal world, will hold equally well about the other, the intellectual. But † PLATO, he adds, subjected the world to thought, and ARISTOTLE even thought to words: the study of philosophy turning into disputation and plausible discourse, and a severe inquisition after truth being laid aside. The meaning of all which is plainly this, that these men turned physics into metaphysics and logic; that in order to make, or to appear to make, which answered their end perhaps as well, important discoveries about the nature and truth of things, one of them had recourse to abstract meditation, which agitates the mind in a perpetual round, and can never terminate in certainty for want of a sufficient criterion; and the other, to an artful use of words, by which a learned ambiguity is main-

\* *Mentem rebus submiserunt.*

† At PLATO mundum cogitationibus, ARISTOTELES vero etiam cogitationes verbis adjudicarunt, vergentibus etiam tum hominum studiis ad disputationes et sermones, et veritatis inquisitionem severiorem missam facientibus. BACON, *Parm. Telef. et Dem. philos.*

tained ; and the whole business of philosophers is to tie and untie these verbal knots \*. For these reasons, and surely they are decisive, the learned chancellor concludes, that their systems of philosophy ought rather to be rejected in the whole kind, than to be refuted particularly, since they are the systems of men who affected to speak much, and who knew little †.

It was said, in the beginning of this essay, that the pretensions to science unattainable, which end always in phantastical hypotheses, might be excusable in those who made the first essays in philosophy, but were without excuse in those who succeeded them, in the course of philosophical generations. The reflection was levelled, and very justly, at PLATO and ARISTOTLE in a particular manner. To pass any such judgment on those who went before them would be very unfair ; because their writings are not in our hands, as those of these two philosophers are, if indeed the canon of ARISTOTLE'S be as well ascertained as that of PLATO'S ; and because the little we can learn of their opinions has been delivered down to us in broken incoherent passages, in confused and inaccurate collections, and by

\* *Nectimus nodos, et ambiguum significationem verbis illigamus, deinde dissolvimus.* SEN. ubi sup.

† *Quare hujusmodi placita magis toto genere reprehendenda, quam proprie confutanda, videntur. Sunt enim eorum qui multum loqui volunt, et parum scire.* BACON, ubi supra.



men very often who did not understand them, or who had their reasons for misrepresenting them. To conceive this the better, we need only consider what informations we have of philosophical systems, more modern than those we speak of, and given us by men who were themselves philosophers. I might instance in many, but I will content myself to ask, whether he that should take all his notions of stoicism from VELLEIUS, or of epicureanism from BALBUS, or of both from the declamation of COTTA, would do much justice to the portic, or to the garden of Gargettus? These philosophies were absurd enough of themselves; but they were made more so by representation.

WE know, in general, that there were philosophers in Greece of great merit before PLATO and ARISTOTLE; that PLATO borrowed from them, as well as from HOMER, without any acknowledgments of the debt, and that ARISTOTLE did his best to defame or destroy their works: for ARISTOTLE, like an Ottoman prince, as my lord BACON was fond of observing, endeavoured to put all his brethren to death: and succeeded in his barbarous design \*. Among these, and probably at the head of them, DEMOCRITUS may be placed. His great reputation gave occasion to silly people, as great reputations do

\* ——— Illum scilicet, ottomannorum more, in fratribus trucidandis occupatum fuisse: quod et ei ex voto successit. De interp. nat. et alibi.

sometimes, to invent a thousand silly stories of him. But of all these no one was more impertinent, than that of his putting out his eyes, that he might meditate with less distraction; which PLUTARCH, in his treatise about curiosity, says was false, but generally reported. Another, which we find in PLUTARCH's Table discourse †, is much more in character. DEMOCRITUS having eat a fig which had a taste of honey, far from shutting his eyes and contemplating the first sweet, he started up from his table in haste to examine the tree and the place where it grew. His maid indeed saved him that trouble, by owning that she had put the figs in a honey-pot. But his first, and as it were habitual, impulse was to make use of his eyes, and to examine the phaenomenon by observation and experiment, which he made the rule of his enquiries, the criterion of his opinions, and the foundation of all his philosophy. "Aetatem  
"inter experimenta consumpsit," he passed his whole life in experiments.

DIAGENES LAERTIUS witnesseth how averse PLATO was to this philosopher; and in truth PYTHAGORAS was more according to his heart. But it were to be wished, since PLATO was to have so great an influence on the progress of science, and since his spirit was to possess philosophers for so many ages, that he had taken his method of philosophising from DEMOCRITUS

† Sympos. Lib. i. c. 10.

rather than from the Samian. The Samian had been instructed, in his travels, in all the parts of philosophy, and he brought particularly the true solar system, no doubt, from his eastern masters. He brought likewise many of their superstitious customs and opinions, and involved, like them, all his doctrines, even the plainest precepts of morality, in mystery. He appears, by the accounts which we find of him in *DIODEGOS LA-  
ERTIUS*, in *PLUTARCH*, in *PORPHYRY*, and *JAMBlichus*, to have learned among the Egyptian priests and the magi the great secret of pursuing ambition under the veil of learning, wisdom, and sanctity; and to have formed in his travels the project which he undertook at his return to execute, the project of opening a school, founding a sect, instituting a religion, and governing all the Greek colonies in Italy and Sicily. *DEMOCRITUS* travelled, like him, and went to the same schools. In this they were alike. But they differed much in the other respects, which could not fail to determine *PLATO* against *DEMOCRITUS*, and in favour of *PYTHAGORAS*. Neither of them were magicians, I suppose, any more than our learned friar, whom the ignorance of his age would have made to pass for such; and as the credulity of *PLINY* made him represent them and others to have been. But as *DEMOCRITUS* was no more a magician, than every able naturalist, chemist, and mathematician will appear in some ages, so he seems to have pretended to no supernatural science and power,

as PYTHAGORAS did; and much less, like him, to have been the delian APOLLO, or any other divine person clothed with humanity and conversing with men. In his disputes with the magi, he seems to have opposed real physics to imaginary metaphysics, and his knowledge of the animal, vegetable, and mineral world, to all their dreams about the intellectual and spiritual. What we know of the atomical system of this philosopher, whether he invented it, or LEUCIPPUS, or a certain Phenician named MOSCHUS long before either of them, may seem little consonant to true theism: and yet his animated atoms, and his intelligent and divine species, may be reconciled to it as well, as some opinions that very orthodox divines have advanced. Philosophers may speak too little, and too much, of the Supreme Being and first cause of all things: and neither of old, nor in our days, has the due mean been enough observed. Now if it does not appear that DEMOCRITUS, whose object was not theology, and the catalogues of whose works have been rather falsely lengthened than shortened, writ any treatise of that sort, we may suppose that he made too little mention, or no mention at all, of the Supreme Being, without supposing him, for that reason an atheist. Whereas PYTHAGORAS, who made theology his capital, reasoned always from heaven to earth, parcelled out the divine nature into a vast variety of beings, interested it, and mingled it in every thing,

and

and contrived to render physics a rhapsody of enthusiastical opinions and fables ; of which proceeding the *Timaeus* in *PLATO* is a very strong and undeniable example. To conclude this comparison, I will only add, that if *DEMOCRITUS* did not acknowledge the unity of a first intelligent cause, and that was objected to him by a pythagorean platonist, for they grew in time to be confounded together, one might ask that famous question, Is it no matter “ *utrum Deum* “ *neges, an infames ?*” whether you deny or defame God ? The ignorance may deserve pity : the defamation deserves abhorrence.

IF I have singled out these two among the philosophers who preceded *PLATO*, and have dwelled so long on their different characters and different methods of philosophising, it has been to shew the more sensibly by the contrast, how and through what channels the wild metaphysics and all the profane theology of the east has come down principally to these enlightened ages of the west ; and how, by the pursuit of unattainable knowledge, philosophers have gone out of the true and natural road to truth, into that which has led them into error, and must keep them in it, by corrupting science even in the first principles.

It is a very true observation, and a very common one, that our affections and passions put frequently a bias so secret and yet so strong on  
our

our judgments, as to make them swerve from the direction of right reason: and on this principle we must account, in great measure for the different systems of philosophy and religion, about which men dispute so much, and fight and persecute so often. But it is not so commonly observed, tho' it be equally true, that as extensive as this principle is in itself, since it extends to almost all mankind, the action of it in one single man is sometimes sufficient to extend the effects of it to millions. Many a system, and many an institution, has appeared and thrived in the world as a production of human wisdom raised to the highest pitch, and even illuminated by inspiration, which was owing, in its origin, to the predominant passion, or to the madness of one single man. Authority comes soon to stand in the place of reason. Men come to defend what they never examined, and to explain what they never understood. Their system, or their institution, to which they were determined by chance, not by choice, is to them that rock of truth on which alone they can be saved from error\*: they cling to it accordingly; and doubt itself was this rock to the academicians.

WHAT has been said cannot be illustrated better than by the example of PLATO. He flourished, as we have observed, about two centu-

\* . . . De rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhaerescunt. Acad. quaest. Lib. ii.

ries after the commencement of the philosophical age in Greece ; for I think that we must place the commencement at THALES, wherever we think fit to place the end of it. The ionic, the eleatic, the italic sects, were already founded, and had made much progress and much noise in the learned world, by the public lessons, whether in regular schools or not it matters little, and by the writings and disputations of several great philosophers, by whom the honour of these schools had been supported, their different hypotheses improved, and their different methods of investigating truth defended. I have said before, that it is impossible to descend into the detail of these systems of philosophy with any assurance : and I will add, in this place, that I have never read any pretended explanations of them attempted by modern scholars, even in an intelligible manner, for this is not always the case, which might not have been for the most part altered, and sometimes contradicted entirely, on the authority of the very same fragments. One thing is certain, however, and we may affirm very safely, that the difference between attainable and unattainable, real and phantastic, knowledge, and between the methods that led to one or the other of these, was not hard to be discerned, after all the essays that had been made in every part of philosophy, and that were still making when PLATO arose. We may believe that there were some who did begin to discern it accordingly, how much soever their notions con-

cerning the first philosophy had been corrupted, and the use of their reason had been perverted, by Egyptian and eastern prejudices. That ANAXAGORAS did, we cannot doubt; and the censure SOCRATES passes on him in the *Phaedo*, makes his panegyric on this head.

DEMOCRITUS passed his whole life, and he lived to be more than an hundred years of age, in a constant application to experimental philosophy. But few there were then, or will be at any other time, who prefer solitude to society, leisure to power, knowledge to wealth, and silent, obscure truth to talkative and glittering error, as this philosopher did. If PLATO had followed his example, he might have made possibly a great revolution in the philosophy of his own age, and might have laid posterity under the obligation of learning from him the way to real, instead of being misled by him into chimerical, science. He might have stood like a polar star to direct future generations in their enquiries after truth, instead of becoming an ignis fatuus, that has danced before their eyes, and has led them into error. But those very dispositions of mind, and that very character which hindered PLATO from following this example, procured him all the reputation he acquired, and has enjoyed so long. In those days, as in ours, philosophers sought fame rather than truth; and the foolish applause of mankind could not fail to strengthen that natural bias.



THE greek philosophers, for the most part, resembled the greek historians mentioned by STRABO. PLATO did so most eminently. The historians, observing how fond their countrymen were of those who writ fables, turned history into romance, and studied to make their relations marvellous and agreeable, with little regard to truth ; in which they were encouraged, after ALEXANDER's expedition into Asia, by the difficulty of disproving any thing they said of countries so remote. Just so did the philosophers in general, and PLATO in particular. They took their ideas and notions superficially and inaccurately from the first appearances of things, and examined and verified them as little as the others did facts. These ideas and notions were combined and compared by them as every man's fancy suggested : and they had, besides these, in the inexhaustible storehouse of fancy, as many *entia rationis* as might supply all their occasions. Thus the Greek philosophy became a chaos of wild discordant opinions and hypotheses concerning divine and human, intellectual and corporeal, nature ; which could neither prove themselves, nor be reconciled to one another. They were the various offspring of imagination : of imagination that affected to rove in the divine sphere, that of possibility, and would not be confined to the human, that of actuality. These philosophical romances, in the light in which they appear to us, may be compared not amiss

to Amadis of Gaul, to PEIRCEFORREST, and the rest of those heroical legends, which were writ in defiance of history, chronology, and common sense, as the others were in defiance of nature and real knowledge; which were the amusements of ignorant ages, and which are feigned so agreeably by CERVANTES to have turned the brains of DON QUIXOTE. I apprehend that few of them had even the merit which LA CALPRENEDE claimed in favor of his Cassandra; for he boasted that, among the fictions it contained, there was no one which might not be deemed true, consistently with history: whereas in the ancient philosophical hypotheses, how little soever we know of them, we know enough to be sure that there were many opinions advanced absolutely inconsistent with the nature of things, and with the dictates of right reason; such as were not only unsupported by either, but as were contradicted by both.

I HAVE touched already the principles from whence all this reasoning madness proceeded; for there is such a thing: and BUCHANAN used the expression, "*gens ratione furens*," very properly. The man, who walked soberly about in the bedlam of Paris, and believed himself God the Father, was certainly mad: and yet he reasoned extremely well when he assured the company that the other, who called himself God the Son, was an impostor, because he, who was the Father, knew him not, nor had ever seen him in  
heaven.

heaven. Thus the philosopher, who is in such haste to arrive at general, that he neglects particular, knowledge, and takes a bold leap from a few clear and distinct ideas to the first principles of things, how well soever he reasons, is mad. DES CARTES was mad whenever he did so : and none but FONTENELLE would have made it a proof of his superiority over NEWTON, who did the very contrary. Ideas may be clear and distinct in the mind, and yet be phantastical, or have only metaphysical reality. But suppose them as real as you please, yet to make them proper materials of general knowledge, we must not attempt to leap, we must go step by step, and, by a slow gradation of intermediate connecting ideas, from particulars to generals. Besides, if we suppose all the ideas we have of both kinds to be in any case real, yet still they may not be sufficient, sufficient I mean in number. The stock we have may serve to establish one general axiom, but not another, more general, which we endeavour to raise upon it. In short, he who imagines that he can extend general knowledge by the force of pure intellect and abstract meditation, beyond the foundations that he has laid in particular knowledge, is just as mad, in thinking he has what he has not, as he who thinks he is what he is not : he is just as mad as the architect would be, who should undertake to build the roof of the house on the ground, and to lay the foundations in the air.

It is not enough to say, that PLATO was an heroical poet; nor after LONGINUS, that he derived from HOMER, as from a great source, very many of his doctrines. He had the genius of those dithyrambic poets, who were said proverbially, and with allusion to their extravagant sallies of imagination, never to drink water. He speaks with great respect of a divine fury, the principal of sublime, metaphysical, and theological knowledge; and he was so full of it himself, that no man, a little less delirious than MARSIUS FICINUS, and a little less simple and bigot than DACIER, can read his writings, as those of a philosopher who sought truth in good earnest, and meant to instruct, rather than to amuse. FICINUS owns \*, speaking of the language of this philosopher, that “ he raves and rambles, ob-  
 “ serves no order, like other men, in his discourse;  
 “ and appears rather to be some priest or prophet, who raves, and expiates, and transports  
 “ others into the same fury, than a man who  
 “ goes about to instruct.” QUINTILIAN †

\* Ad LAUR. MED. prom.—furit enim interdum atque vagatur, ut vates, et ordinem interea non humanum servat, sed fatidicum et divinum; neque tam docentis personam agit, quam sacerdotis cujusdam, atque vatis, partim quidem furentis, partim vero caeteris expiantis, et in divinum furorem similiter rapientis.

† Multum enim supra profam orationem, et quam pedestrem Græci vocant, surgit, ut mihi non hominis ingenio, sed quodam delphico videatur oraculo instructus. Lib. x. c. i.

speaks

speaks to the same effect : and even CICERO, as partial as he was, is forced to confess, that his style was rather that of poetry than of prose. Let me add, that when he sinks from these imaginary heights of enthusiasm and false sublime, he sinks down, and lower no writer can sink, into a tedious socratical irony, into certain flimsy hypothetical reasonings that prove nothing, and into allusions that are mere vulgarisms, and that neither explain nor enforce any thing that wants to be explained or enforced.

As the founder of the academy drew the grotesque of his theology and metaphysics principally on the canvas that HOMER and PYTHAGORAS had spread for him, so it seems to me, that he proposed much the same objects of ambition to himself, as the Samian did. I do not mean to make any ill-natured reflections on his voyages into Sicily, nor on his intrigues with DION, nor to insist on those which have been made. If he took a great sum of money, it was to buy books. If he rode into Syracuse in a gilded chariot, drawn by four white horses, and with all the pomp of a triumph, it was to humor the tyrant he meant to reform. If he obtained a district of country in Sicily, as PLOTINUS did some centuries afterwards in Italy, it was with the same design, to set mankind an example of the most perfect form of government. But still we must not think him as free from ambition as SOCRATES seems to have been. He

took warning indeed from the examples of PYTHAGORAS and of SOCRATES. One taught him to moderate his political, and the other his philosophical, zeal. But still, with all this apparent moderation, he had an ambition as real as any other, tho' compatible with moderation, and even leaning on the appearances of it, as on so many necessary supports. There is an ambition that burns as hotly under the mantle of a philosopher, or the cowl of a monk, as in the breast of an hero; and that exerts itself as effectually, and often as hurtfully to mankind as the other. The cell of BERNARD, or that of HILDEBRAND, even before he got the papacy, was a scene of as much intrigue, and as many ambitious projects, as that of FERDINAND the catholic, or of CHARLES the fifth. If the characters of DIONYSIUS the elder and the younger did not suffer PLATO to regulate the government, and exercise legislation in Sicily, nor the dotage of the Athenian commonwealth in his own country, he acquired however a much greater dominion than that of Syracuse or of Athens, and held a much nobler and higher rank than that of tyrant or of archon. He could not persuade his countrymen: to attempt to force them, he thought unlawful: he retired therefore into the academy, and exercised in that retreat, like BERNARD in his monastery, a far greater power, quietly and safely, than any that princes, or the principal men in commonwealths, could boast of, with all the trouble and danger to which they stood continually exposed

exposed in their public life. His reputation, and the authority founded on it were such, that appeals were made, and ambassadors sent to him from different people, who solicited him to give them laws ; a favour he bestowed on some, and refused to others. In another part of the resemblance between BERNARD and him, the saint indeed outdid the philosopher very much. He acquired immense wealth to his order, as well as to his particular convent. Whereas PLATO left nothing but his philosophy to the philosophers of his sect, in general : and tho' he increased the revenues of the academy, and tho' the custom of obtaining further acquisitions of wealth by the testamentary dispositions of persons who desired to encourage this school, prevailed from his time ; yet all this would have been but a mite in the Bernardine treasury.

In the last part, which I shall mention, of resemblance between these two theologians, the Pagan had vastly the advantage over the Christian. The order of the monks, instead of maintaining a superiority over other orders, was soon lost in the crowd of them ; or, if distinguished, was distinguished only by ignorance and luxury, and the pomp of their principal men. Whereas the sect of philosophers did not only eclipse all those that were more ancient, but outshine and outlast all that were cotemporary or of later institution. It spread into Asia when ALEXANDER carried his arms thither, and into

Egypt under the auspices of his successors. Platonism returned back, as it were, to those nations from whom the doctrines of it had been derived originally ; altered indeed, but easily known, and therefore eagerly embraced by the true parents, because of the many allegorical, enigmatical, cabalistical, mystical features, which it retained of the family.

I DO not believe that PLATO was an enthusiast in any other sense, than you poets affect to appear such when you call for inspiration, and boast of the divine fury : and I could sooner persuade myself that he was never in earnest, than that he was always so ; for which opinion I shall give you my reasons on some other occasion. But sure it is that he has made enthusiasts in all ages, and in all churches ; in the Christian church particularly, the most seraphic saints, and the most extravagant heretics : of all which I shall have occasion to speak more at large elsewhere ; for as this philosopher had a place frequently in our conversations, the mention of him will return frequently in these essays, which are repetitions a little extended of the former, and which claim some of the liberty allowed in the former.

PLATONISM flourished in Italy as well as in Greece, in Asia, and in Egypt : and the extravagant encomiums of SOCRATES, PLATO, and their school, which we find so often repeated by TULLY, would be alone sufficient to shew us  
how



how highly this philosophy was esteemed in the Roman commonwealth. But tho' it was held in this esteem, I think that it had received at that time a blow which made it no longer fit to be propagated with success, as it was then taught. It was become a philosophy for sophists and rhetors only : and the dogmatical varnish, which had imposed at first, being taken off by ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES, there remained nothing in it on which the minds of men, that seek naturally to be determined and fixed, could rest with complacency. Cupidity and tableity, those ridiculous abstractions, which DIOGENES laughed at PLATO for supposing, had passed in the world ; but to make men doubt of the existence of the cup and the table, was impossible.

THE most absurd system, that is dogmatical, will prevail sooner and longer, and more generally, than that of the second or third academy, or that of PYRRHO did, which arose about the same time : and the dullest Stoician that ever was, would have persuaded men to assent to this proposition, “ the world is a wise being \*,” as readily as to this, in a bright sunshine, “ it is now light ;” much sooner than CARNEADES would have persuaded them to lay aside all claim to decision, and to confound true and false in

\* Nec magis approbabit nunc lucere—hunc mundum esse sapientem. CIC. Acad. Quæst.

the class of probability †. It is not worth while to enter into any nice distinction that may be made between these philosophies. It is enough for our present, or any other reasonable, purpose, to consider them all together as the systems, if they can be called systems, of men who entertained a perpetual suspension of mind, denied that any certainty was to be had, and disputed, at most, about probability. Such a man as TULLY, who was ostentatious of his eloquence, might very naturally take, as he did, this part upon him \*. He protests in his Academical Questions against any imputation of ostentation indeed ; but there will be no uncharitableness in laying much more weight on what fell from him in the second Tusculan, where he confesses that the custom of disputing for and against every thing pleased him much, because it was “*maxima dicendi exercitatio.*” In short, altho’ the academicians chose a much more easy task, when they undertook to refute the Stoicians and the Epicureans, and every other dogmatic sect, than that of defending the apparent dogmas of their master would have been ; yet it seems to me, that they could not have stood long on that foot, nor have acquired the fame, which those mad-

† Philosophiam——quae confundit vera cum falsis, spoliatur nos iudicio. Ibid.

\* Si aut ostentatione aliqua adductus, aut studio certandi, ad hanc potissimum philosophiam me applicavi, non modo stultitiam meam, sed etiam mores, et naturam condemnandam puto.

men, who succeeded them in the profession of platonism, acquired.

ANTIOCHUS, the third in succession from CARNEADES, and the last in the direct academic line, began to deviate from the principle and conduct of ARCESILAUS improved by CARNEADES; and, under pretence of reviving the old academy and genuine platonism, he taught dogmatically the doctrines he found in PLATO, and blended them with those of the Portic and the Lyceum. From this time, the false sublime of PLATO began to speak more strongly than ever to the imagination, to the affections and passions, and, aided by the quibbles of ZENO, and the subtilties of ARISTOTLE, in a short time after to the prejudices of mankind. I speak thus generally, because platonic philosophy, which had been confined to schools in Greece, in Asia, and in Egypt, or had been cultivated by a few particular genii at Rome, became fashionable, and spread more than ever, when it had re-assumed the gawdy dress of which it had been stripped in the academy for seven generations of philosophers at least. If the Roman ladies were not Platonics in love, they were such in philosophical speculation: and the emperors ADRIAN, ANTONINUS, and MARCUS AURELIUS, for instance, were as fond of the philosophical gown, as of the imperial mantle. JULIAN was so, not long after them, to a degree of fanaticism.

## S E C T. X.

WHEN I come to speak of authority in matters of religion, of the Christian particularly, it will be proper to shew how platonism was incorporated with it; how the former served to deck out the artificial theology grafted on revelation; and how the latter served to perpetuate the former. Here I consider platonism relatively to the effects it has had on science in general: and as to them, I say that they have perverted the use of reason, and corrupted the first elements of human knowledge, or substituted such as are phantastical in the place of such as are real. These first elements of human knowledge are the ideas we acquire, according to the established order of human nature, from the very dawn of life. As we grow up we learn of course to examine, to compound, and to compare these in some degree or other, and sufficiently for our ordinary use in the stations and circumstances of life wherein we are placed. If all this be not very accurately done, as it is not always, and perhaps seldom, there arises very rarely any great inconveniency from it. But the case becomes extremely different in matters of higher concern, in those of philosophy, and of the first philosophy especially. The more complex, and the more abstract our ideas and notions are, the more likely are we to frame or retain

tain them ill; the consequence of which must be error on the most important subjects that can exercise the human mind. What shall we say then of a writer, who has not only propagated on these subjects phantastical ideas and notions for real, with an imposing air, but has attempted to turn mankind out of the way of framing any others on every subject? Shall we say that he was the philosophical HOMER? We shall trifle egregiously if we do. Allusion, allegory, metaphor, and every part of figurative style is the poet's language. Figments of imagination are his subject. The philosopher may sometimes employ the former cautiously, and under much control: the latter never. Reason must be his guide, and truth alone his subject. When they are not such, tho' he keeps the name, he goes out of the character: he is guilty of fraud. PLATO was eminently guilty of it: and the taint has descended, like that of original sin, to his posterity.

ALL his lineal successors have followed the example he set them in several forms, according to their several talents. They attempted it even in physics. But error of this kind has not been established, nor fixed, nor sanctified. Corporeal nature affords a public standard obvious to sense, and by which every man may try the ideas and notions of another, whether they be phantastic or real: and for this reason physical knowledge has been in almost a constant course of improvement;

the errors have been from age to age corrected ; and the sensible phaenomena, which are the objects of it, being numberless, it has been vastly extended, as well as ascertained, in these latter ages. Since the revival of experimental philosophy, speculative whimsical naturalists have imposed no more than OVID, who did not mean, nor than LUCRETIVS, who did mean, to impose their physics for true philosophy.

PLATO did his best to disgrace this criterion, and to persuade men not to trust to it, even to verify their simple ideas of sensible objects. Metaphysics suited his purpose better, just as an half light suits better, than a full light, the purpose of one who has false wares to vend. We have indeed in our minds a criterion of spiritual nature, and of matters purely intelligible. But this criterion is not as public, and as common to all men, as the other. However phantastical, inadequate, or confused and obscure the ideas and notions of another man may appear to me, he is at liberty to affirm that they appear quite otherwise in his mind : and tho' I may not believe him, I cannot contradict him. What can I say to a mystic, who boasts of special grace, and divine illuminations ; or to a metaphysician, who pretends to make incomprehensible abstractions, and to clamber up PLATO's mystic ladder from opinion to knowledge, the knowledge of immaterial forms, more than this, I perceive no such illuminations, I can make no such abstractions, I have

have no such ladder? These divines and philosophers are stopped, like their fellow-creatures, on the very outskirts of the intellectual world, notwithstanding their boasts: and if they related nothing of it more than what they have felt, seen, and known, they would relate nothing more than other philosophical travellers. But as they pretend to have gone farther, they may well pretend to have felt, seen, and known more.

PLATO was such a traveller, and the father of philosophical lying to us, who are not acquainted with those who preceded him. Those who preceded him might neglect an exact determination of ideas, and a steady use of words, the signs of these ideas; which is no more than all philosophers are apt to do: but he is to us the first who taught men, instead of distrusting, to renounce their senses in the search of truth; and, instead of taking their ideas from the outward impressions, and inward suggestions of nature, to take them from an assumed region of ideas, which never existed out of delirious brains. This doctrine, that poisons science to the very roots, is in part so absurd, and in part so notoriously false, that we may justly wonder how he could mistake the truth in one case, and affirm, if he really meant to affirm, and expected to be believed, directly against it in the other. That we cannot have knowledge of sensible objects, absolute knowledge, a knowledge of the essences of the substances, is most true; not for the reason  
he

he gives, because they are in a perpetual flux, always generating, never existing : but because we cannot discern by our senses their inward constitutions and first qualities, nor any thing more than their effects on us. Such knowledge is relative to our state, and would not be the same in another ; it is human knowledge ; no more. But still it is one kind of knowledge, and very sufficient for us. I have not an opinion, I know, that I am warmed or burned : and if Christianity had been never published, I should have known, not believed, myself to be a man, not a cock. As MALBRANCHE, who was transported by the delirium of PLATO, by that of DES CARTES, and by his own all at once, made use of faith to realise sensitive knowledge ; so PLATO found in the intellectual world the forms and essences of substances, as well as the ideas and notions that we have of mixed modes and relations. All these, according to him, were fixed and permanent, eternal exemplars and divine entities, and therefore the sole objects of science. Reason was placed between the objects of intellect and of sense. The “ first belong to God, and to some “ of the elect among men\*.” When reason rises up to the first, it acquires the knowledge of things divine : when it descends to the latter, it is filled with the errors of opinion. Science is therefore “ a comprehension of things divine by

\* *Intellectus autem Dei proprius, et paucorum admodum electorum hominum.*



“reason †.” I take the substance of what is here said from MARSILIUS FICINUS, to whose exposition of PLATO’s meaning there can be no objection made : and I add, that if I took the whole, the jargon would be still more surprising.

WHAT man, who was not in the delirium of a metaphysical fever, and who turned his eyes coolly and soberly inward, has not seen that we know nothing of sensible objects but what our senses discover to us, and our memory retains of them after they are discovered ; and that all those ideal entities, the abstract forms of them, are the bold fictions of imagination ? Who ever reflected on the operations of his mind, and did not perceive that all his ideas, or complex notions of mixed modes and relations, are the creatures of the mind, who puts them together for her use as experience and observation direct, nay arbitrarily if she pleases ; that he never discerned them any where but in his own mind ; that they are of mere human production ; and that as they are often variously combined or compounded by different minds, so they are seldom preserved in any mind steadily and invariably ? Shall we be afraid then to say that the doctrine of ideas in PLATO is absurd and false, and that he has by teaching it corrupted the first elements of knowledge ? It is manifest that he has done so, too manifest to be denied : and for

† *Divinarum rerum certa comprehensio.* MARS. FICIN. ep. in Theætetum.

this reason his admirers have endeavoured rather to accustom mankind to the absurdity, by their constant imitations of it, than to defend it.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that has been observed, and much more that might have been observed to shew the fallacy and impertinence of a philosophy that has been so long admired, this philosophy has rolled down a torrent of chimerical knowledge from Pagan and Christian antiquity, with little opposition, and scarce any interruption, to the present age; for which reason it is as necessary to expose the futility of this philosophy now, as it would have been many centuries ago. Not only Pagan, but Christian theology has been derived from PLATO in great measure; and, as strangely as that may sound, even from HOMER too, if he imitated HOMER as much, and borrowed as much from him, as LONGINUS and others of the ancients affirm. There is a certain marvellous which dazzles and seizes the mind, the philosophical as well as the unphilosophical; and the man who thinking he understands, admires his own understanding, as well as the man who admires, because he does not understand. This gave a great lustre to the platonic philosophy: and is employed in season and out of season, so as to run through almost every part of it. But there is something more to be observed. PLATO affected to write so equivocally, and so inconsistently, according to the different subjects, and different characters of inter-

interlocutors, whom he introduces in his dialogues, that he might pass either for a dogmatist, or a sceptic. The latter academy took this hint ; but they followed a middle course, denying certainty to the dogmatists, and maintaining probability against the sceptics : in which middle course they could not, however, have maintained themselves long, as it has been observed already. The latter Platonicians therefore assumed the doctrines of their master to be dogmatical, taught them with all their own improvements as such, succeeded better, and lasted longer. Thus has the fame of this school been preserved, and the philosophy been propagated, under different forms, to one uniform purpose, to seduce men out of the precincts of real knowledge.

## S E C T, XI.

**N**OT only curiosity was indulged, but vanity was gratified by it. An identity in nature, or a cognation, as the learned CUDWORTH calls it, of the divine and human mind being once established, it is no wonder that the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge were confounded, and became undiscernible. The farther we carry our discoveries concerning the animal system wherein we have our place, the more proofs we find that all the parts of it are full of life, and sense, and intelligence, in an inconceivable variety of degrees, but in some degree or other : and MALBRANCHE had reason

to say, “ les petits animaux ne manquent pas  
 “ aux microscopes, comme les microscopes  
 “ manquent aux petits animaux.” Now the  
 moral effect of such a survey as this should be,  
 both a greater adoration of the Supreme Being,  
 and a greater humiliation of ourselves, who are  
 so closely connected with the rest of the animal  
 kind. But the profane assumption we speak of  
 here, which had it’s foundation in the platonick and  
 Pythagoric systems, tends to lessen our admiration  
 and adoration of the Supreme Being, or at least  
 the humiliation of ourselves, by taking our  
 thoughts off from the sensible connection be-  
 tween us and other animals, and by applying  
 them to an imaginary connection between the di-  
 vine and human nature. There are no Anthro-  
 pomorphites I think left : but there have been  
 men among the most devout theists of Paganism,  
 and there are those among Christian philosophers  
 and divines, who join God and man as absurdly  
 by a supposed similitude of intellect, knowledge,  
 and manner of knowing, as those heretics did  
 by a supposed similitude of figure. Vanity has not  
 only maintained this absurdity among the fol-  
 lowers of PLATO, but spread it among those of  
 different sects. I will not turn to the extrava-  
 gant passages of this sort, that are to be found  
 in the writings we have of the latter pythagori-  
 cian Platonists. I will mention one only from  
 those of St. AUSTIN, which happens to occur  
 to my memory, and may serve instar omnium.  
 Nothing is superior to the human soul, says that  
 father,

father, but God. "Nihil est potentius—nihil est sublimius. Quicquid supra illam est jam creator est." This doctrine the saint learned, as he learned that of the divine Logos, from PLATO, or from those madmen, the disciples of PYTHAGORAS and PLATO. In short, the vanity of the human heart indulged itself in this kind of flattery so much, that even the Stoics borrowed the same notions. Human reason is, according to SENECA, not only a portion of the divine spirit immersed in body, the same in God and in man, with this sole difference, in him it is perfect, in us capable of perfection\*; but it was an axiom of that school, that the soul is divine, and all divine natures are the same†.

PHILOSOPHERS being thus drawn, in their own conceit, out of that class of beings in which the Creator had placed them, and having placed themselves, according to their own good pleasure, and without any other claim to it than arbitrary assumption, in a sort of middle state, at least, between God and man, in which too they pretended themselves able to place others by certain metaphysical nostrums; these mountebanks and their zanis were easily induced to imagine, that since their souls were immortal, and participant of the divine nature, they were capable of

\* In corpus humanum pars divini spiritus immersa—~~in~~ diis hominibusque communis. In illis consummata est; in nobis consummabilis.

† Divinorum una natura est.

knowledge of all kinds, and of wisdom more than human, even whilst they wore the garb of humanity. Believing themselves wrapped up in pure intellect, whilst they were in truth transported by mere imagination, they assumed their knowledge, like their nature, to be divine. Clogged by bodies, and confined for a time to this inferior system, they could not enjoy the full prerogatives of their own, nor attain complete absolute knowledge. But still they enjoyed and exercised these prerogatives in a good degree, clogged and confined as they were, when they abstracted their souls from their bodies by spiritual exercises and profound meditation, and rose by this abstraction in pure intellect up to contemplate the divine ideas, and to know, if not as much as God, yet in the same manner, and much more than other men. PLOTINUS, who was so ashamed to wear a body, that he would never suffer any picture of it to be drawn, had been ravished more than once, as PORPHYRY affirms, to an union with the Supreme Intelligence: and he himself had been so once. It was not hard for such philosophers to believe, and to make it believed, that the knowledge unattainable by others was attainable by them; and that whilst ordinary persons, incumbered by body, and groveling on earth, acquired with much pains a little particular knowledge, they had the metaphysical secret of rising to universals.

SUCH as these were the men who, issuing from

the schools of Pythagoric and Platonic philosophy, disturbed the progress of real knowledge, and by flattering the vanity of the human mind, turned it to phantastical. Heathens adopted these notions the more easily, because they had already adopted those of genii, of demons, of celestial and super-celestial-gods, who formed a chain of intelligence from the human up to the Supreme. Christians too might adopt them the more readily, because they had other as undetermined ideas of cherubim and seraphim, of thrones, principalities, powers, and virtues, of archangels and angels, of three hierarchies, and nine choirs of celestial spirits, figments of crack-brained enthusiasts, such as DENYS the areopagite, and the scholar of St. PAUL, if in truth, there was any such person, and if some pious knave did not forge the book, and an author for it. These notions might serve, as well as those of the Heathens, to form an intellectual chain, and a short gradation of intelligence from God to man. But orthodox Christians had no need of any such chain. They knew by the scriptures, that the correspondence between God and man was often immediate, and even intimate and familiar with his elect, and with such purified souls as were prepared for it. They found in the Old testament one example of a patriarch translated very corporeally into heaven, and one in the New of an apostle ravished thither, he knew not how. But the whole tenor of the sacred writings represented the Supreme Being in

frequent conference with his creatures, God covenanting, or making bargains with man, and man with God ; God holding the language of man, reasoning, arguing, expostulating, in a very human manner, animated by human affections, and appealing to human knowledge. In short, they believed farther, on the same authority, that the Word, the wisdom of the Father, the very God, had been incarnated here on earth, assumed an human body, lived like a man with men, and died at once by their hands, and for their sakes. It could not be hard surely, for those who believed all this, and who were accustomed to think in this manner of the divinity, to be persuaded that God knew by the help of ideas, like man, so close was the analogy between their natures ; that there were two regions of ideas, the one of ideas of sense, the other of ideas of pure intellect ; that the former being nothing more than representations of appearances, and relative solely to the system in which they arose, nothing more could be acquired by them than probability, and opinion founded on it, sufficient indeed for vulgar use, tho' not so for philosophical purposes ; but that minds illuminated by philosophy could rise to the higher region, in which alone certainty and scientific knowledge were to be acquired, by contemplating those intellectual ideas, abstract natures, eternal essences, incorporeal substances, and all the objects of metaphysics.



FROM such phantastical notions we know, that men set out in search of phantastical knowledge above two thousand years ago, and how much sooner we cannot say. In hopes of reaching unattainable, they neglected attainable, knowledge; scorned to confine themselves to that to which they were confined by the author of nature; and attempting to rise above the level of humanity, they sunk below it: for they surely are below it, who imagine themselves to be what they are not, to have knowledge where they can have none, and to want it where it lies open to their industry.

It would have been no agreeable attempt in those days, nor is it a welcome one in these, to fix the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge. The philosophers we speak of are as ridiculous in a quite contrary sense, as the learned mandarins of the Chinese. The mandarins had decided that China, a part of Tartary, the other states that lay around them, and the neighbouring islands, contained the whole world. They knew no other, they enquired after no other, and were astonished therefore when the jesuits shewed them a map of the two hemispheres. The philosophers remain unacquainted with their own country, and enquire little about it, or about those that lie nearest to it. They are wholly taken up with imaginary countries at an immense distance, where they never

were, and concerning which they can have no intelligence from any that have been there. But the absurdity of absurdities is this: they pronounce dogmatically, and they pretend to demonstrate when they speak of these unknown countries; and they sink into doubt and hypothesis when they speak of their own.

COULD philosophers have been persuaded to analyse the human mind, to examine intuitively the faculties of it, and to compare them with the objects of their enquiry, the extravagant notions spoken of might have been soon exploded, the progress of phantastical knowledge might have been stopped early, and that of real knowledge might have been advanced without interruption.

BUT the ill star of knowledge contrived to render this impracticable. It has been said, that ARISTOTLE was an ungrateful scholar to his master PLATO. It may be so. But this obligation, at least, the master had to the scholar: the scholar raised a mist that hindered men from discerning, as they might have done sooner or later, the absurdity of his philosophy: and this mist continued thickening before the eyes of men for many ages. The Romans were far from correcting and improving the Greek philosophy. They contented themselves to translate and imitate: and the same servile manner of philosophising was followed after the resurrection of letters. A ridiculous veneration for PLATO revived with them:

them: and ARISTOTLE maintained in the schools the empire he had usurped every where during the dark ages of gothic, of arabian, and of ecclesiastical, barbarity. The ancient fathers of the church had recommended these two philosophies sufficiently to more modern doctors, by their example and writings. But ARISTOTLE had helped to defend what PLATO had helped principally to establish: and as defence grew more and more necessary from age to age, so the reputation and authority of ARISTOTLE, which were great in the Mahometan, seemed to rise above those of PLATO in the Christian, schools of philosophy; or at least to be more employed in them. I am not ignorant that many passages of the fathers and other Christian writers may be cited against the peripatetic philosophy: but these passages serve only to multiply proofs, that these venerable persons were apt to contradict one another, and even themselves. Cardinal PALAVICINI was very angry with father PAUL for saying, when he speaks of the sixth session of the council of Trent, wherein so much use was made of the distinctions of the Stagyrice, that without this assistance “we should have had many “articles of faith the less\*.” The cardinal denies the fact so little, that he justifies the proceeding by the example of those ancient councils, who did the same when they distinguished so nicely substance, person, and hypostasis. I know

\* Noi mancavamo di molti articoli di fede: Hist. del conc. trid. Lib. ii.

not whether it be true, tho' I incline to believe it if MELANCTHON said it, that the ethics of ARISTOTLE were read publicly in some churches instead of the gospels. But every one knows, that he and his philosophy have been spoken of by great divines and most devout persons of the Christian and Mahometan churches, in terms so hyperbolical, that they are blasphemous.

By such combinations of circumstances, and by others that were favorable to the Aristotelean philosophy, a jargon of words that seemed to explain, without explaining, and the rules of a dialectic that seemed to prove, and that did prove indifferently either in favor of truth, or of error, took up the whole attention of philosophers, and rendered it impossible for them to make any advances in learning and knowledge. All the rational powers of the strongest minds were so misapplied, that giants employed themselves in picking straws; and men, whose intellectual sight might be compared to that of LYNCEUS, wandered about in a metaphysical and logical mist, always in search of truth, finding it seldom, and mistaking often even error for it. Phantastical ideas, new invented words, and new applications of old words put into a quaint syllogistical form, made up the sum of the mirabilia, the inopinata, and the paradoxes of the Stoics. Much in the same manner did schoolmen proceed in subtilising their ideas and notions, and in turning and winding them by rules of art,  
without

without any concern to compare them with nature, and to verify and fix them by what is. The consequence has been, that altho' much of the cant of the schools is laid aside, yet many phantastical or undetermined ideas and notions, and many unmeaning words, or words of vague signification, which grew into use, or were confirmed in use then, impose still; and that even some of our finest writers banter themselves and others with them. It must not be imagined, that he who reasons, or seems rather to reason, closely and consequentially, has therefore truth always on his side. To be sure of this, we must be sure that his words have ideas and notions perceivable by us, attached to them; we must be sure that all these are steadily employed, and we must be able, by a careful analyse of the ideas and notions, where there is the least room for doubt, to discern whether they are phantastical or real, and adequate and complete, clear and distinct, or the contrary, relatively to the subjects about which they are employed. If we do this, we shall be neither seduced by declamation, nor deceived by argumentation. Some writers impose, as fairies and enchanters in romances are said to have done: but if we do this, their charms will be broke, and either nothing, or something extremely absurd or weak, will appear, where a stupendous and solid pile presented itself to our first sight. If we neglect this, not only MALBRANCHE, or the bishop of Cloyne, those excellent poets, may lead us agreeably

agreeably "*per ambages deorumque ministeria,*" through such mazes of error as none but the brightest genii are able to contrive ; but your ghostly father, if you had one, might undertake to convince you by dint of logic, that when he affirms the same body to be at the same instant in different places, he is far from affirming, that the same body is and is not in the same place.

## S E C T. XII.

**I**T will sound oddly to some ears, that the right use of reason, and the right conduct of the understanding in the investigation of truth, and the acquisition of real knowledge, is a very late discovery : and yet nothing is more certain. It was not near so soon after the resurrection of letters, as it might have been expected, that the phantastical and fashionable philosophy of PLATO and ARISTOTLE began to be exploded. Little by little, however, there arose men, who made this use of the light that increased gradually in the orb of science. There were some essays made, faintly, diffidently, and occasionally at first, like those of men, who emerging out of darkness, were dazzled as well as enlightened ; or of men, who were sensible that they might suffer for saying, that they had seen what they had seen, or that they knew what they knew, in opposition to the confirmed prejudices of mankind. Others followed with greater assurance, like men  
born

born in the light, whose eyes were able to bear a greater effulgence of it, and who besides this had less, for even they had something to fear from ecclesiastical, abetted by civil, power. One of these, and the first that deserves to be named in this roll, was our VERULAM, that astonishing genius, who durst form the design of rebuilding science from the foundations. I presume not to say how near he brought this design to bear, nor how practicable he left it. But this I may say, that the foundations were ill laid before his time ; and that he laid, on the rock of nature and truth, such as can alone support this building. The meanest cottage that art ever raised can rest on no other safely ; and the most stupendous pile of philosophical systems may rest on these immoveably. Whatever esteem he was tempted to think, by a review of their scattered remains, that the more ancient philosophers of Greece might deserve, he considered the works of PLATO and of ARISTOTLE, which have been alone preserved, as the bane of philosophy. They had been followed servilely from their own age to his : by which means they had stood as barriers against all improvement ; and the poisonous springs they had opened continued to infect all the streams of knowledge. He attempted, therefore, to depose these tyrants in philosophy, and to draw men off from the enthusiasm of one, and the sophistry of the other, from the contemplation of confused and ill abstracted ideas and notions, and from a wanton, not to say a fraudulent,

lent,

lent, use of words, to the contemplation of nature, and a strict regard to things. The very first aphorism of the *Novum organum* states the only true object of human knowledge, and limits that which every man may be said to have acquired, to what he has discovered of nature by observation and experience \*.

HUMAN knowledge, to be real, must be derived from, and tried by, what really is, according to my lord BACON and to truth : and he was so far from indulging the licentious use, which philosophers make of that dangerous power of the mind, the power of imagining what may be, and of erecting hypotheses into systems of knowledge ; that he insists on the necessity, not that we should doubt of every thing, but that we should examine every thing, that we should purge our minds of all those idols, as he styles them, those false and superficial notions that are taken from vulgar opinion, and at best from philosophical rumor, which were the foundations of platonism, tho' PLATO used some sort of induction, and of peripateticism ; and finally, that the mind being thus prepared to receive the direct, or reflected, rays of truth, we should not reject, but assist and control sense in a course of learned experience ; abstract our notions from things with the utmost accuracy ; and proceed, as far as we

\* Homo, naturae minister et interpres, tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturae ordine, re, vel mente, observaverit : nec amplius scit, aut potest.



can proceed, in the same manner, to aphorisms and axioms more and more general.

WHILST the fame of this great man was fresh, and his works were in every learned hand both at home and abroad, DES CARTES arose, another luminary of the philosophical world : and I could easily suspect that my lord BACON's writings were not unknown to him ; for as little as it is pretended he used to read, he did not disdain to borrow from authors of inferior note, of the same country : and they who repay with ample interest, like DES CARTES, into the common stock of learning, need not be ashamed to borrow sometimes. The French philosopher, like the English, made clear and distinct ideas the necessary materials of knowledge. But then, as he left this important article too general and too loose, so whilst he built up truth with one hand, he laid a foundation for infinite error on the other. He disarmed the scholastics; but he furnished arms to the mystics. Besides clear and distinct ideas, he admits a certain inward sentiment of clearness and evidence. The word sentiment is applied in the French language so variously and so confusedly, that it becomes often equivocal. But since it is distinguished, on this occasion, from idea, it must be meant either to signify that immediate perception, which the mind has of some self-evident truth, in which case it is not a principle of knowledge, but knowledge itself, intuitive knowledge ; or else it must be meant to signify  
that

that apparent evidence wherewith notions and opinions enter into the mind of one man, that are not accompanied with the same evidence, nor received in the same manner, in the mind of another. Now in this case, the lively inward sentiment of DES CARTES is nothing better than that strong persuasion, wherewith every enthusiast imagines that he sees what he does not see, hears what he does not hear, feels what he does not feel, and in a word, perceives what he does not perceive. If any thing else be meant by sentiment, thus distinguished from idea, as a principle of knowledge, I confess myself unable so much as to guess what it is. But notwithstanding this, DES CARTES holds an high rank among those benefactors to mankind in the advancement of knowledge, who freed human reason from the chains of authority. He improved natural philosophy by geometry, and geometry by algebra : in which respect he shewed the way to our NEWTON.

GASSENDI was another of these reformers of philosophy, and the restorer of the atomical doctrine. He exposed, even to ridicule, the dialectics of ARISTOTLE : he disarmed the Peripateticians of these enchanted weapons ; and would have completed, by his victories over them, the subversion of their long established empire, if he had not apprehended, with reason, enemies much more formidable than mere philosophers, because armed with ecclesiastical and civil power.

It

It is this fear, which has hindered those, who have combated error in all ages, and who combat it still, from taking all the advantages which a full exposition of the truth would give them. Their adversaries triumph, as if the goodness of their cause had given them the victory; when nothing has prevented their entire defeat, and reduced the contest to a drawn battle, except this, that they have employed arms of every kind, fair and foul, without any reserve; whilst the others have employed their offensive weapons with much reserve, and have even blunted their edge when they used them.

If it was my design to speak of all those, who have advanced real knowledge in all its parts, since the resurrection of letters, beyond such of the ancients at least as we are acquainted with, the roll would be a long one. But my intention being to speak of those alone, who have studied the human mind, rectified, or pretended to rectify, the errors of it, and thereby improved, or pretended to improve, our reason; I shall content myself to mention two that are the best known to me, Mr. LOCKE, and the author, perhaps I should say authors, of the Logic of Port-royal.

THE first steps towards a right conduct of the understanding, and a just discernment of unattainable knowledge, and of that which is attainable, in different kinds and degrees, are an accu-

rate analyse of the mind, a careful review of the intellectual faculties, as well separately as in their co-operations, and an attentive observation of the whole intellectual procedure, natural and habitual, as it has been hinted already. When this is well and truly done by any writer, the reader will feel consciously that it is so; for he will perceive the phænomena of his own mind to be such as they are represented, and he will recollect that the same things have passed there, tho' he has not always, or at all, observed them. This happens to me when I read the Essay on Human Understanding. I am led, as it were, through a course of experimental philosophy. I am shewn myself; and in every instance there is an appeal to my own perceptions, and to the reflections I make on my own intellectual operations. I know that this method is disagreeable to some, and I am not surpris'd that it should be so. There are those who think they do not want it; and they are those who want it most. There are those likewise who fear it; because they apprehend that analyse of ideas and notions, that comparison of them with the real nature of things, and that steady precision in the use of words, which would reduce many a dogmatic system to pass for nothing better than a fanciful hypothesis, as it really is.

THE Logic of Port-royal will suit such persons as these, and especially those of the second sort much better. In whatever language or country  
this

this treatise had been published, it would have appeared to be not an art of thinking, but an art of thinking conformably to Christian doctrines, and to those of Rome particularly. It is contrived to mangle and distort human reason, so as to proportion it, I do not say to revelation, but to theology; tho' theology should be proportioned to reason: and I add, that if reason could be made by abuse to serve the purposes of this theology, it might be made by no greater, nay, by the very same, abuse to serve the purposes of any other, pagan or mahometan. Now this proceeding is unfair: and he who holds it means to deceive, not to instruct. The true art of thinking must be the same among all mankind, since their intellectual system, and the things of nature from which their ideas and notions ought to be abstracted, are the same. But if this example was followed, the art of thinking would vary, as the different metaphysics of MENCIVS and DES CARTES, or the different theologies of the Bonzes and the Jesuits, vary. Art should direct practice: but thus, practice would direct art. There would be one art of thinking for Christians, one for the doctors of Mecca, one for the literati in China, and so on.

THO' I give, on this occasion, a preference to BACON and to LOCKE over DES CARTES, and the author of the Logic of Port-royal, it is not from so mean and contemptible a motive as this would be, that they were Englishmen. The

advancement of knowledge, and the improvement of reason, are of common concern to all rational creatures. We are all of the same country in these respects: and he who thinks and acts otherwise, is a promoter of faction in the great commonwealth of learning. As much as I admire these two philosophers, I am not blind to their errors; for even I, who have no telescopic eyes, can discern spots in these suns. I can discern a tincture, and sometimes more than a tincture, in BACON, of those false notions which we are apt to imbibe as men, as individuals, as members of society, and as scholars; and against which he himself is very solicitous to put us on our guard. I am convinced, more by his example than by what he says, that these false notions render the admission of truth into the mind more difficult, and the hold of error more strong. I can discern, in Mr. LOCKE, sometimes ill abstracted and ill determined ideas, from which a wrong application of words proceeds, and propositions to which I can by no means assent. I confess, farther, that I have been, and am still, at a loss to find any appearance of consistency in an author who published a Commentary on the epistles of St. PAUL, and a treatise of the reasonableness of Christianity, which he endeavours to prove by fact and by argument, after having stated as clearly, as he had done, the conditions and the measures of historical probability, and after having written as strongly, as he had done, against the abuse of words. I think that neither

BACON

BACON nor LOCKE have kept up entirely to their own rules. But I think these rules are established by them more truly than by any others.

THAT they are not so, in one very considerable instance, by DES CARTES, I have observed already; and shall not seek for any other in that respectable author. But the charge I have brought against the logic above mentioned is so very heavy, and this fault, among others, runs so evidently through the whole book, that I think it necessary to produce some examples of it. To produce them will be sufficient: I shall make few or no reflections on them. Turn, if you please, to the fourth chapter of the first part, and to the fourteenth of the second, which treat of the ideas of things, and the ideas of signs, and of the propositions wherein the names of things are given to their signs. You will soon see how far this writer was from meaning any improvement to human reason, by all the trifling matter he puts gravely and dogmatically together.

THAT we have ideas which are made sometimes to stand as signs of other ideas is true; and so we have ideas which are made to stand in the relations of cause and effect to other ideas: but the ideas of both these kinds may be considered unrelatively; and they become ideas of signs, or causes, or effects, by an occasional act of the mind, which joins them sometimes properly, and sometimes improperly, in these relations to

others. The idea of respiration, like that of spontaneous motion, is one of those that compose our complex idea of every animal. It is a part of the idea, not a sign of the whole. It cannot be the sign of any particular animal, because it is common to all animals. It cannot be the sign of animality, or the supposed abstract idea of animal, because we have no such idea. It cannot be the sign of that confused crowd of ideal animals, that the mind represents to itself whenever we endeavour to think of animals in general, any more than the sign of any particular animal. They all imply it; and they may be said to be so many signs of respiration, just as well as respiration to be a sign of them.

BUT be this as it will, about which it is silly to bestow many words, let us observe that this author, who pretends to teach men how to think, endeavours to impose on them very grossly, as grossly as if he had imagined that they could not think at all without his help. Having amused his readers with the hypothesis of ideas of signs, made such by nature in some cases, and by institution in others, that are sometimes certain and sometimes probable, all which is very proper to perplex the thoughts of young logicians; he slides in, as evident examples of what he advances, such as have not even an apparent connection with it. He distinguishes most nicely between signs that are joined to things, and signs that are separated from them. Symptoms, he  
says;



says, the signs of sickness, are joined to sickness. Let it be that they are so in nature, and in our ideas, however this matter might be otherwise explained : but then he adds, as if all these were things analogous, “ thus the ark, the sign of the “ church, was joined to NOAH and his children, “ who were the true church at that time : thus “ our material temples, the signs of the faithful, “ are often joined to the faithful : thus the dove, “ the sign or figure of the Holy Ghost, is joined “ to the Holy Ghost : thus the washing of bap- “ tism, the sign or figure of spiritual regenera- “ tion, is joined to this regeneration.” In speak- ing of signs that are separated from things, he is not so profuse of examples. He produces one only, but that as appositely as any of the others. It is taken from the sacrifices of the mosaic insti- tution, which were, he says, so many signs of JESUS CHRIST offered up in sacrifice.

I MIGHT conclude my extracts here : but since it is of use to shew how great reason there is to guard against the fraud, as well as madness, of philosophy, it may be proper to mention a few more passages of the same absurdity or ridiculous importance out of this famous book. We are told then farther, that “ a thing may hide and “ discover another thing at the same time. It “ may be thing and sign at the same time, and “ may hide as thing, what it discovers as sign. “ Hot ashes, as a thing, hide the fire ; as a “ sign, discover it. The forms that angels bor-

“rowed, as things, hid them; as signs, disco-  
 “vered them. The eucharistical symbols, as  
 “things, hide the body of CHRIST; as signs,  
 “discover it.” Again, we are taught that  
 “the nature of a sign being to excite in the  
 “senses the idea of the thing figured by the  
 “idea of the thing figuring, as long as this ef-  
 “fect subsists, that is, as long as this double  
 “idea is excited, the sign subsists, even tho’ the  
 “thing be destroyed in its own nature. Thus,  
 “it is of no moment whether the colors of the  
 “rainbow, which God has taken for a sign that  
 “he will destroy mankind by a deluge no more,  
 “be real and true, provided that the same im-  
 “pression be always made on our senses, and  
 “that they (can he mean our senses?) make use  
 “of this impression to conceive the promise of  
 “God. Just so, it is of no moment that the  
 “bread of the eucharist subsist in its proper  
 “nature, provided that the image of bread  
 “which serves us to conceive in what manner  
 “the body of CHRIST nourishes our souls, and  
 “how the faithful are united one with another,  
 “be excited constantly in our senses.” One may  
 now safely challenge the ablest professor in bed-  
 lam to crowd more nonsense into fewer words;  
 and yet it is faithfully extracted from a book  
 which is put into the hands of young men, as I  
 remember that it was into mine, in order to im-  
 prove their reason, by teaching them a right de-  
 termination of their ideas, and a right conduct  
 of their understanding,

To say the truth, tho' experimental philosophy has been vastly improved by the moderns, and tho' a true conduct of the understanding may be said justly enough to be a new discovery in general, yet the same reformers, who have rooted up a monstrous crop of old errors, have left some of these, and have planted others. The first philosophy particularly has been over-run with both: and learning has finished the round which ignorance began. In the darkness of ignorance, superstition prevailed; in the light of knowledge, overweening curiosity, the offspring of self-conceit, as self-conceit is of pride. Both are natural to the human mind, and each of them developed itself into activity at different times, and in that state of things that was proper to it: superstition first; for ignorant, uncivilised people, who are fierce to their fellow-creatures, are timid and docile under every apprehension of superior power. Of these dispositions, in favorable conjunctures, the Persian ZERDUSHT, whoever he was, the Indian FOX, and the Arabian MAHOMET, knew how to profit: and the magi, the bonzes, and the doctors of Mecca, were not at liberty, if they were inclined, to frame their notions of the first philosophy according to nature and truth. They were to think on the principles their masters had laid. These were to be asserted, not examined. Fact was to be bent, and common sense perverted, into a conformity with them, Puerilities and vulgarisms were to be  
taken

taken for marks of a divine simplicity, and the ravings of enthusiasm for the mysterious language of inspiration. If the case has not been quite so bad in the Christian world, yet I will undertake to shew you, in another of these essays, as I endeavoured to do in one of our conversations, that the superstition of ignorant ages, and the phantastical knowledge of those that were more learned, have produced some as extravagant opinions in theology among Christians, orthodox and heretics, as any we can reproach to the Mahometans, or even to the pagans; and that they work their effect even at this hour.

ALL errors, even those of ignorance and superstition, are hard to remove when they have taken long hold of the minds of men, and especially when they are woven into systems of religion. But there are some from which men are unwilling to depart, and of which they grow fond, for a reason that has been often touched. As men advance in knowledge, their self-conceit and curiosity are apt to increase; and these are sure to be flattered by every opinion that gives man high notions of his own importance. What contradictions and inconsistencies are not huddled together in the human mind? Superstition is produced by a sense of our weakness; philosophical presumption by an opinion of our strength; and superstition and presumption contribute alike to continue, to confirm, and propagate error.

A SYSTEM of philosophy, which had not contained a system of theology, as well as of politics, would have been held in no esteem among the ancients. Many such were formed, but with these considerable differences between the two sorts. Errors in rules of policy and law were easy to be corrected by experience, like errors in natural philosophy. Nay, the first were so the most, because how little regard soever philosophers might have to experience in either case, the truth would force itself upon them, or others; in one by the course of affairs; whereas it must be sought, to be had in the other. But when it was sought, it was obtained. Errors in theology and metaphysics could not be thus corrected; neither easily, nor at all, among men who seemed tacitly agreed to admit and confine themselves to no criterion in these sciences, neither to the phaenomena of their own spirits in their doctrines about spiritual nature, nor to the works of God, and the conduct of his providence, in their speculations about his attributes.

ANOTHER difference between systems of theology, and those of politics and laws, has been, and always must be, this, that the latter may be various, nay contrary to one another, and yet be such as right reason dictates; provided they do not stand in opposition to any of the laws of our nature. But in theological reasonings, and those which are called metaphysical, the various  
 opinions

opinions may be all false, or if they are not all so, one alone can be true. This consideration should have had two effects. It should have rendered philosophers and divines more cautious in framing opinions on such subjects, and less positive in maintaining them from the beginning: and when they found a multitude of questions arise, which were indeterminable for want of a sufficient criterion, they should have ceased the pursuit of unattainable knowledge, and have confined themselves to the improvement of that which God has judged sufficient for us, and has given us the means of acquiring. The very contrary has happened to such a degree of extravagance, as must seem delirious to every one who is not in the same delirium. Can he be less than mad who pretends to contemplate an intellectual world, which he assumes, in the dull mirror of his own mind; of which he knows little more than this, that it is both dull and narrow? Can he be less than mad, who perseveres dogmatically in this pretension, whilst he is obliged to own that he arrives with many helps, much pains, and by slow degrees, to a little imperfect knowledge of the visible world which he inhabits, and concerning which he is therefore sober and modest enough to reason hypothetically? In a word, can he be less than mad, who boasts a revelation superadded to reason, to supply the defects of it, and who superadds reason to revelation, to supply the defects of this too, at the same time? This is madness, or there is no such thing incident

dent to our nature: and into this kind of madness the greatest genii have been the most apt to fall: a St. PAUL, profound in cabalistical learning; a St. AUSTIN, deep read in PLATO; a father MALBRANCHE, and a bishop of Cloyne. Elevation of genius makes them giddy: and these men, like those who are born in the purple, imagine they can do every thing they have a mind to do, because they can do more than others. The mistake has been fatal to both; to these heroes in philosophy, as well as to the others. Tho' all men are not placed on the same level, there is a level above which no man can rise: and he who compares the nature of his mind with the nature of things will be sure to find it.

I HAVE now thrown upon paper all that occurs to my present thoughts, or all that I have leisure to digest and extend, of what has been thrown out in many conversations concerning the folly and presumption of philosophers, the rise and progress of their boasted science, the propagation of error and superstition, and the partial attempts that have been made to reform the abuses of human reason. It has amused me in writing, I wish it may amuse you in reading, and be of instruction to us both. Regular treatises and complete systems you do not expect from me: nor should you have them, if I had a much higher opinion of my own capacity than I have. My superiors in knowledge and parts would do better perhaps, if even they were content

tent to write essays, that they might improve, correct, or reject, as I am always ready to do, on farther observation, reflection, and information. In the mean time, what has been now said may be sufficient, as I think, to establish the general proposition, that there would be more real knowledge, and more true wisdom among mankind, if there was less learning, and less philosophy.



# POSTSCRIPT

TO THE

## SECOND ESSAY.

HAVING observed, in the foregoing essay, how absurdly and presumptuously philosophers reason upon a supposed analogy of the human with the divine mind, whilst they scorn to look downwards, and to observe the real analogy that there is between the mind or soul of the whole animal kind, the human species included; it has come into my thoughts to add the reflections that follow as relative to the same subject.

You may see in TULLY\*, that the Stoics, who observed the internal and external constitutions of men to be very differently affected, according to the different climates, concluded from thence, that there were creatures of more sublime natures in purer air; and filled unknown spaces with these unknown inhabitants. I am

\* De nat. deor. Lib. ii.

far from embracing this hypothesis; but it seems to me that there is a probability sufficient to force our assent to another, which has prevailed less, because it is founded on a degree of astronomical knowledge that few persons have now, or had anciently; whereas the former is a mere wild assumption of imagination. The hypothesis I mean, is that which we find in the *Cosmotheoros* of Mr. HUYGENS, and from which FONTENELLE has borrowed the materials of his pretty book of the *Plurality of worlds*. Tho' I give this hypothesis so modern an original, because it is best known and sufficient for my purpose, I am not ignorant that it had been advanced before, and that ORPHEUS, as well as Mr. HUYGENS, peopled the planets. We have reason to think he did by those verses which PROCLUS has preserved, and in which the Thracian bard speaks of houses and cities in the moon. But how old or how new soever this hypothesis may be, it assumes you know, that the planets of our solar system, and the same may be assumed of those of a multitude of other solar systems, which the immensity of the universe contains, are worlds that have an analogy with ours, and the habitations of animals that have an analogy with us. The analogy must be no doubt, very remote, in such a vast variety of positions, constitutions, and laws of nature: but still there may be, and there are very probably, relations both physical and moral between all these numberless worlds and systems of worlds, as between various parts  
of

of one stupendous whole, and the habitations of ten thousand times ten thousand millions of intellectual corporeal beings, who live, like us, under the providence, general or particular, of the incomprehensible Creator of all things.

SHALL we be so absurd and so impertinent now as to imagine, that all these creatures of God, tho' corporeal like men, are confined to the same degree of intelligence, or even to the same manner of knowing? or, rather than believe that they are in these, and perhaps in other respects, superior to us, shall we assert that there are no such beings, and deny that they exist, tho' we discover some of their habitations? Philosophers who lived before the invention of microscopes might have asserted just as well, that the "*minima naturae*," imperceptible by their minuteness, as these beings by their distance, did not exist. We cannot discern a gradation of beings in other planets by the help of telescopes, as we observe such a gradation by the help of microscopes in our own; but the gradation of sense and intelligence in our own, from animal to animal, and of intelligence, principally, up to man, as well as the very abrupt manner, if I may say so, in which this evidently unfinished intellectual system stops at the human species, gives great reason to believe, that this gradation is continued upwards in other systems, as we perceive it to be continued downwards in ours. We may well suspect that ours

is the lowest, in this respect, of all mundane systems; since the rational is so nearly connected, as it is here, with the irrational: and there may be as much difference between some other creature of God, without having recourse to angels and archangels, and man, as there is between a man and an oyster.

WE are not able to conceive any manner of knowing, which we have not: and yet certain it is, that there may be many such. But even if we assume arbitrarily, that there is no other manner of knowing, as those profane divines do who confine that of God himself to knowledge by ideas; yet will it be still evident, that other creatures of God may enjoy the same faculties that we have in a more perfect manner. It is easy to conceive, for instance, that there may be animals whose senses can penetrate the inmost constitutions of substances, and who, having ideas of their real essences, know the first general principles and causes, where we know nothing more than some particular effects. There may be minds wherein ideas and notions once received or framed, never fade nor vary. Such minds may discern, at one glance, and by immediate intuition, the agreement or repugnancy of all their ideas and notions. The solution of the most difficult problem may be to them as easy, as the comparison which shews the equality of twice two to four is to us. In a word, there may be, and it implies no contradiction to suppose

pose that there are, creatures in other systems of animal being tempered with finer clay, cast in nobler moulds, than the human, and animated by spirits more subtle and volatile than ours, whatever theirs or ours are. It were to be wished that philosophers, who are so intent on the least probable hypotheses, would contemplate this, and would compare the manifest imperfections of their own nature with the possible, nay probable, excellencies of other animal natures. They might avoid one extreme into which they are apt to fall, by looking down on inferior beings; and another, by looking up at superior. This double view would teach them neither to undervalue human nature, as some have done; nor to over-rate it, which is the folly of more.

WHAT has been here said concerning the intelligent inhabitants of other planets is purely hypothetical. It can pass for nothing more. But I am sure that it is much more consistent, and more conceivable, than the other system, which prevails in our days, as it did in those of old, the system of an intellectual world, a world of immaterial ideas and of spiritual natures. Neither is it liable to have such absurd notions and practices grafted upon it, as have been grafted on the other. The inconsistency of maintaining, like PYTHAGORAS, that the human soul is a portion of the deity, "*particula divinae aerae*," and at the same time, that there are other spiritual beings between God and man; or like St. AUGUSTINE,

that there is no mind existent between the human and the supreme mind, "*nec ulla natura interposita;*" and, at the same time, that there are intelligencies superior to man, and inferior to God: the inconsistency of these opinions, I say, is equal, and equally obvious. But, on the other hand, to deny that there is any affinity between the supreme and created intelligences is very consistent with this assumption, that the chain of intelligence from man upwards, through many orders of created intellectual beings, is immeasurably long, tho' the uppermost link of this chain is not supposed to be fastened to the throne of infinite wisdom, nor to be nearer to it than the lowermost. Again: since our planet is inhabited by corporeal intellectual beings, the hypothesis that assumes the other planets to be so likewise, is much more conceivable than that of legions of angels, of demons and genii, and of pure and impure spirits, which pagan theology invented, and Jews and Christians adopted. Whether we suppose these beings immaterial, according to the present mode of opinion; or whether we suppose them, as the ancients both heathens and Christians did generally, to be fine material substances, like that whereof they made the human soul, or wherewith they thought proper to clothe it in its separate state, and of which TULLY says in his *Tusculans*, "*tanta ejus tenuitas, ut fugiat aciem;*" whichever we suppose, this hypothesis stands on no other foundation, philosophically speaking, than that of a

mere possible existence of such spirits as are admitted for divers theological uses. The other hypothesis is founded on what we know of actual existence. We are led to it by a plain, direct, and unforced analogy. We know that there are habitations: and we assume that they are inhabited.

THE first might appear plausible, as it did in those ages when poets and philosophers, as well as the vulgar, imagined that the Supreme Being, who spoke, to use a common expression, and the universe was made, and every act of whose will is sufficient to destroy it again, stood in need, like some earthly monarch, of ministers to attend his throne, of messengers to convey, and of troops to execute, his orders: when they looked on the visible world as on a great palace, whose floor was the earth, and whose cieling, or upper story, was the sky \*; and when, in consequence of such phantastical notions, they supposed the upper story, or heaven, to be the habitation of gods, and of other celestial persons, as the lower story, or earth, was that of men. But it is time that these wild imaginations should have no longer any place in the first philosophy. As far as revelation realises and sanctifies them, they must be employed by the divine: and he has, in revelation, a sufficient authority for employing them. The philosopher, whose object is natural theology, has not the

\* *Cujus coelum laquear, et terra pavementum.*

comes because the reality of such existences cannot be derived from any knowledge he has of nature, and therefore cannot be justified in going beyond the bounds which this knowledge prescribes. Faith and reason, revealed and natural knowledge, ought to be always distinguished; lest one should be confined, and the other extended too much: and divines and philosophers should keep in their distinct provinces.

Thus they proceed, for the most part, in matters of natural philosophy. The modern philosophers, tho' very good Christians, communicate the wonderful discoveries that have been made in corporeal nature, and concerning the true system of the universe, without any regard to their repugnancy to the mosaic history of the creation, and to almost all the notions of the sacred penman, which were plainly those of an ignorant people and unphilosophical ages. When such of these philosophers as are divines endeavour to reconcile to philosophical truth these apparent contradictions to it, they do but shake the authority of the scriptures, and shew most evidently how necessary it is to keep theology and philosophy each on its proper bottom, and to avoid at least, by comparing these different systems, to demonstrate that they are irreconcilable. St. Austin and others paid, as divines, no regard to cosmography, and flatly denied the antipodes. The inquisitors at Rome denied that GALILEI saw what he said he saw, and



and punished him very consequentially for saying that he saw it. Several divines follow the same method. They enter into cosmographical disquisitions no more than St. AUSTIN, nor into astronomical any more than the Roman inquisitors; but content themselves to take the history of the creation according to the literal and obvious sense, as they find it related in the book of Genesis, and as they would take any other journal or historical relation. They who have done otherwise, and have found, upon trial, that this relation, thus understood, could not be reconciled to nature, reason, philosophy, nor natural theology (for natural theology teaches us to think of God in a manner very opposite to the ideas which MOSES gives of the Supreme Being, and of his operations) have made use of two expedients little favorable to the mosaïc history: for some have assumed it to be in this part wholly mythological; and others, unable to wrest natural philosophy into an agreement with it, have so wrested the text into a seeming agreement with their philosophical theories, as to make it plain that this text may be applied to any hypothesis, with some ingenuity, a skill in languages, and a knowledge of antiquity. — But I stop here a digression that might carry me insensibly a great way, and that was intended only to shew, that since men have not admitted, in favor of revelation, a system of physics that is inconsistent with philosophical truth, there is no reason for admitting, in favor of the same revelation, a

system of pneumatics that is so too : whereas an hypothesis that has some foundations of probability in natural philosophy may be admitted, for this reason, by the philosopher ; and even by the divine for another reason, because it is not inconsistent with revelation. If it be said that the pneumatical system, which establishes so many orders of spiritual beings, is not inconsistent with any knowledge that we have of nature ; that it is properly a system, because it is established on revealed authority ; and that if we consider it in a philosophical light alone, and merely as an hypothesis, it is better founded than the other ; since we may assume, that there is a world of spirits, from what we know of our own spirit, by a more direct and easy analogy than that by which we assume, that the planets are inhabited by corporeal intelligent animals : if this be said, the answer is obvious and decisive. That there are such spiritual beings, as the authority of revelation is brought to prove, may not be inconsistent with some philosophical truths, but is so with others. Let it be, that any knowledge we have of natural philosophy does not contradict this system : yet is it suspicious to the first philosophy, because unnecessary ; and inconsistent with it, because the reasons for the generation, to speak like the heathen, or the creation, to speak like Jews and Christians, of this unnecessary world of spirits, the supposed manner of their existence, and the uses to which they are put, or suffered to put themselves, with a multitude

multitude of other circumstances, stand in opposition to several truths of the first philosophy, or natural theology, and have served only to promote polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. These dogmas then, for if they are revealed they cease to be hypotheses, must be solely maintained on the authority of the scriptures.

IF the divine keeps on that ground, he cannot be defeated. He may own his inability to answer the objections, and to solve the difficulties opposed to him; or may refuse more prudently still to give any attention to philosophical reasonings, by urging, that a time will come, a time appointed of the Father, when every knot will be untied, and every seeming repugnancy of reason to revelation will be reconciled; and that he is contented, as the philosopher ought to be, to wait for that time. The rabbi might defer his answer till ELIAS comes: The Christian till the Messiah comes in his glory, and till the consummation of things. In the mean while, a sort of truce should take place between the divine and the philosopher. The former should forbear the vain attempt of bending reason to support revelation in this case; which is often done in many others, and almost always with notable prejudice to the latter. The philosopher should forbear to invade the province of the divine, on this condition; and should content himself to assert and promote natural theology, without opposing it to supernatural. Both of  
them

them might thus concur in receiving the hypothesis of planetary worlds, which does not require to be contrasted with the other, nor should have been so by me, if I had not thought it necessary to shew at the same time, that there are probably finite created intelligences vastly superior to the human, and that there is however no such gradation of intelligent beings, as raises the most elevated of them a jot nearer to the supreme intelligence than the lowest. I oppose this theological system, and I defend the philosophical hypothesis, the rather, because by these means we may combat the pride and presumption of metaphysicians in two most flagrant instances, in the assumption of a gradation of the same intelligence and knowledge from man to God, as I have said already, and in that by which man is made the final cause of the whole creation; for if the planets of our solar system are worlds inhabited like ours, and if the fixed stars are other suns about which other planets revolve, the celestial phaenomena were no more made for us than we for them. That noble scene of the universe, which modern philosophy has opened, gives ample room for all the planetary inhabitants, whom it leads, and even constrains us to suppose. Where the spirits of the other system reside was a question easily answered, when superstition and hypothesis made up the sum of theology and philosophy. But it is not so easy to be answered now. Are the good and pure spirits in heaven? But where is heaven? Is it beyond  
all

all the solar systems of the universe? Or is it, like the intermundia of EPICURUS, in expanses between them? Are the evil and impure spirits in hell? but where is hell? Is it in the center of any one planet for every system? Or is it in the center of every planet? Do others wander in air? or reside latent in every element? Are they confined invisibly, like those that the Chinese imagine, to certain countries and cities, to rivers and lakes, to woods and mountains? Or is it their employment to attend on particular men, the guardian angels of some, or the devils and the tempters of others; for temptation is ascribed to the evil spirits still, tho' possession is so no longer, I think, out of Spain and Portugal, and other countries where religious ignorance prevails as much as in them, if any such there are?—Tantum—



# ESSAY THE THIRD:

Containing some further REFLECTIONS

## On the RISE and PROGRESS of MONOTHEISM,

That first and great PRINCIPLE of

NATURAL THEOLOGY,

OR THE

FIRST PHILOSOPHY.





# ESSAY

## THE THIRD

### SECTION I.

**I** HAD finished the last essay before I recollected that there was something in Mr. LOCKE's Discourse concerning the reasonableness of Christianity, very repugnant to what I have advanced about the knowledge of the one true God, and to what I shall have occasion to say, on another occasion, about the ignorance of natural religion, under which it is supposed that mankind labored before the coming of CHRIST. I shall not anticipate the second point, but shall bestow some more reflections on the first, in order to judge, whilst the subject is fresh in my mind, whether I ought to retract any thing that I have said to you in conversation, or that has fallen from my pen upon the subject. If it appears, on examination, that my notions are not so well founded in fact and in reason, as those of this great man, in the present case, I shall submit with pleasure to an authority, that

that I respect extremely in all cases; and if it appears that they are better founded than his, in both, one useful lesson will be the result of this examination: we shall learn how unsafe it is to take for granted any thing, in matters especially which concern, or which are thought to concern, religion, that we have not ourselves examined; and how inexcusable it is to do this in cases wherein we may be able, with a little pains, to judge for ourselves.

THE first article of natural theology, in which the heathens were deficient, according to Mr. LOCKE, was the knowledge of one God, maker of all things. He admits, at the same time, that the works of nature, in every part of them, sufficiently evidenced a deity; and that, by the impressions of himself, God was easy to be found. These assertions do not seem very consistent: and therefore it is added, that the world made so little use of their reason, that they saw him not, "sense and lust blinded their minds. But the rational and thinking part of mankind, he confesses, found the one supreme, "invisible God, when they sought after him." If this be true now, as it is most certainly, the heathen world made as good use of their reason, for ought I can see, as the Christian world. In this, it is not the irrational and unthinking, but the rational and thinking, part of mankind who seek, and find the true God: and just so we are told that it was in the other. Besides, if this  
be

be true, it follows, that this great and fundamental article of natural theology is discoverable by a due use of human reason ; and Mr. LOCKE acknowledges accordingly, again, that God was found by the wise and virtuous : which is a limitation of no great significancy to his purpose, since the vicious would have sought him in no state of mankind, nor the foolish have found him. But, says this writer, the wise and virtuous had never authority enough to prevail on the multitude, and to persuade the societies of men, that there was but one God. If he had proved, as well as affirmed this, he would only have proved, what no man denies, that sufficient means to reclaim men from polytheism and idolatry, and to establish the belief of one God, appear to have been wanting in general, and to a great degree, as far as the memorials we have of ancient nations can shew. He would not have proved, that the light of nature was insufficient, nor that the religion of nature was defective in this respect. He would not have proved, what he had in view to establish, that the belief and worship of one God was the national religion of the Israelites alone, and that it was their particular privilege and advantage to know the true God, and the true worship of him ; whilst all other nations, from the beginning, adored the host of heaven, as EUSEBIUS asserts very confidently, tho' he is far from proving it.

EUSEBIUS took much pains, and used much  
 VOL. II. M art,

art, I might say artifice, to spread an opinion that this knowledge and all good theology were derived from the Jews, and from their scriptures; nay, that the philology and philosophy of the whole learned world were purloined from thence, and the heathens were plagiarists, who lighted their candles at the fire of the sanctuary; as some modern EUSEBIUS or other, GALE, I think, expresses himself. JOSEPHUS had gone before EUSEBIUS in the same design; for thus far Jews and Christians made their cause common: and he had begun to falsify chronology, that he might give his nation a surprising antiquity. EUSEBIUS did the same: and without taking the trouble of descending into particulars, many of which are acknowledged by learned and orthodox writers, I may say, that from that time to this, or to the time when by the revival of letters, and the invention of printing, the knowledge of antiquity was made more easy and common, much the same practice was continued with much the same success. Ancient memorials have been forged and altered for this particular purpose, mere assumptions have been delivered as facts, and nothing has been neglected to give not only antiquity, but illustration, to a nation that never had much of the latter out of their own writings, and those of Christianity. As the history of the Jews was committed to the care of their scribes; so the propagation of every learned system, that could tend to the confirmation of it by reconciling anachronisms and

and by coloring improbabilities, has been the charge of a particular order of men among Christians, who had the monopoly of learning for many ages, and who have had a great share of it since. This has been imposed on the bulk of mankind, prepared by their prejudices to acquiesce under the authority of great names, and frightened from examining by the enormous piles of Greek, and Latin, and eastern languages, in which such authors seem to entrench themselves.

NOTWITHSTANDING this, I will say, and, if I know any thing, I say it on knowledge, that these entrenchments are not tenable. They cannot be battered down always, perhaps, by the same arms by which they are defended: but sure I am, they may be undermined; and he who searches their foundations will find that they are laid on sand. JOSEPHUS and EUSEBIUS will be of great use to him against themselves. Their writings are repertories of valuable fragments, and of such as would be more so, if more credit could be given to the fidelity of those who cite them. I have sometimes thought, that we might apply properly enough to the Jew, and the Christian, author, what LA BRUYERE says, in his Characters of PERAULT, that he quoted so many passages from ancient writers, whilst he attempted to prove the superiority of the moderns, that his works were read for the sake of these passages.

THINKING in this manner, I could not fail to be surpris'd when I found such assertions as are mentioned above, in a treatise writ by Mr. LOCKE. The common herd of writers copy one another in every point that makes for their common cause, about which alone, and not about truth, they seem to be concerned. They affirm over and over so positively, and so long, things destitute of proof, or evident falsities, that even the last grow into belief; according to the practice of the court of Rome, as father PAUL represents it, in her usurpations. I should not have easily suspected Mr. LOCKE of such a proceeding, nor of affirming dogmatically what he had not sufficiently examined. But he has writ below himself in this instance, by going out of his way, and has assumed the spirit of those who write on the same subject; much like Sir ISAAC NEWTON, who lost himself in the vague probabilities of chronology, after having pursued with so much success the certainty of mathematical demonstration.

I MEDDLE not here with any thing that is said concerning that clear knowledge of their duty, which was wanting to mankind, as Mr. LOCKE affirms very untruly, before the coming of CHRIST; nor with the theological part of this treatise. I confine myself to these propositions: That all the heathens were in a state of darkness, and ignorance of the true God; and consequently that the belief and worship of one  
God

God was the national religion of the Israelites alone. Now here I observe a want of that precision, which this great man is so careful to keep in all his other writings. As he does not distinguish enough the want of a sufficient knowledge of natural religion, and the want of sufficient means to propagate it, which he rather confounds in all he says about them; so he uses these two expressions, the true God, and one God, as if they were exactly synonymous; whereas they are not really so: and the explanation, and justification of the distinction, in the present dispute, will set the matter on a very different foot. It is not unity alone that constitutes the complex idea, or notion of the true God. There is, there can be but one such Being: and yet a monotheist may be as far from the knowledge of the true God, as the rankest and most superstitious polytheist. I have taken notice, in the precedent essay, how the belief of one God, and of many, was reconciled in the heathen theology several ways: and what I have touched transiently may be seen made out fully in the Intellectual system. A polytheist, who believes one self-existent Being, the fountain of all existence, by whose immediate or communicated energy all things were made, and are governed, and who looks on all those other beings whom he calls Gods, that is, beings superior to man, not only as inferior to the Supreme, but as beings all of whom proceed from him in several subordinate ranks, and are appointed by him to the

various uses and services for which he designed them in the whole extent of the divine economy; such a polytheist, I say, will approach nearly to true theism, by holding in this manner nothing that is absolutely inconsistent with it: whilst the monotheist, who believes that there is but one God, and ascribes to this God, whom he should conceive as an all-perfect Being, the very worst of human imperfections, is most certainly ignorant of the true God, and as opposite to true theism as the atheist: nay, he is more injuriously so. Mr. LOCKE would have done like himself, if he had made these reflections before he had joined in the common cry: and he might have thought, perhaps, in that case, that the coming of CHRIST was necessary to give the Jews true notions of God, as well as to convince the Gentiles of his unity.

INSTEAD of this, he takes the common opinion for granted, supposes what is in question, and does not so much as attempt a proof. He says indeed, that “there was no part of mankind  
 “—— that had a greater light of reason, or  
 “that followed it farther in all sorts of speculations, than the Athenians; and yet we find,  
 “he adds, but one SOCRATES amongst them  
 “that opposed and laughed at their polytheism  
 “—— and we see how they rewarded him for  
 “it.” He quotes in the same place the reproach that St. PAUL made to this people.  
 “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all  
 “things



“ things ye are too superstitious : for as I passed  
 “ by, and beheld your devotions, I found an  
 “ altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN  
 “ God.” If these were meant for proofs of  
 what he asserts, they were unluckily chosen.  
 Matter of fact is mistaken in one, and in nei-  
 ther of them is there the least color of argument.  
 SOCRATES was so far from opposing the religi-  
 ous worship established at Athens, that he held  
 it to be the duty of every citizen to follow the  
 religion established by the laws of his city, as  
 we know upon good authority, that of XENO-  
 PHON : and if we turn to the Euthyphro in  
 PLATO, we shall find him declaring, in his zeal  
 for polytheism, against all the traditions which  
 he judged to be unworthy of the gods, tho’ they  
 were believed and respected by the vulgar. This  
 was his crime. He neither opposed, nor laughed  
 at polytheism, tho’ he certainly believed the  
 unity of the Supreme Being. But the zeal of  
 bigots in those days, as in ours, made it no less  
 criminal to reject the abuses of religion, than to  
 profess atheism : and a faction in the state took  
 advantage of this, to put him to death.

BUT if we suppose, for argument sake, that  
 he was put to death for opposing and laughing  
 at polytheism and idolatry ; if the Athenians  
 were superstitious, as they were undoubtedly,  
 and if they dedicated an altar to the unknown  
 God, what will all this serve to prove ? It will  
 prove only that men are apt, and even the most

judicious sometimes, to erect their scanty knowledge of a few particulars into a supposed general and certain knowledge of any subject. A little tract of land passes with them for the whole world, two or three nations for all mankind, and two or three thousand years for all antiquity. Are we able to compare the Athenians very exactly in this respect, or in any other, with the people who flourished at the same time, and of whom we have some accounts in history and tradition? How much less are we able to compare them with so many other nations, of whom not so much as the names are come down to us, or were known to them? What argument then can be drawn from the polytheism, idolatry, and superstition of this little state, to that of the whole world, which is the point to be proved? or from the Athenians in the days of SOCRATES, or ST. PAUL, even to the Athenians themselves in the ages whereof the priests of Sais talked to SOLON; nay to the whole race of mankind in these, and still more ancient ages? for even these were not deemed the first.

I MIGHT leave the argument here, since the author of the Reasonableness of Christianity offers no other proofs of the facts he advances. But I think myself obliged to justify my opinion, so contrary to his, and to that of the whole crowd of scholars, on whose authority he rests. Great men take great liberties, and expect to be believed on their words: and the disciples of Mr.

LOCKE have as good a right, as the disciples of any philosopher, to use the *ἀνδρῶν ἐφη*. But for me, who cannot allow it to any in matters which I am able to examine, and who should think myself obliged to give my reasons even for agreeing with him in all such matters, it seems still more incumbent upon me to give those which induce me to differ from him: and I shall do so without repeating much of what has been said by me already.

I HAVE said in the former essay, and I have given my reasons for it, that I do not believe mankind discerned the unity of God in the first dawnings of knowledge. But the impressions of the Creator are so strongly marked in the whole extent of the creation, and the idea of an all-wise and all-powerful Being, the first cause of all things, is so proportionable to human reason, that it must have been received into the minds of men as soon as they began to contemplate the face of nature, and to exercise their reason in such contemplations; and this was long before the commencement of any traditions that we find out of the books of MOSES. Profane memorials shew us the whole world (and sacred memorials except the patriarchs and the Israelites alone out of this dark scene) involved in polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. But still both sacred and profane concur in shewing us some gleams of light that break through these clouds, some notices of the knowledge and  
worship

worship of the true God, that were kept up among the sons of men. They appear faintly, and very imperfect they were in these times, perhaps, early to us, tho' late with respect to the beginning of our mundane and human system. But still they appear, and give us sufficient reason to collect from their appearances much more than they shew us immediately.

It is strange to observe how unwilling ecclesiastical writers and divines are to admit this truth : and it is often provoking to observe that they, who have no more pretence to be believed about their own religion, than the heathen writers about theirs, presume to contradict what the latter of these affirm about their faith, in opposition to the invectives of Christian writers, tho' they appeal to the ancient doctors of paganism, whom they do not appear to have interpolated, and under whose names there is no pretence to say that they have imposed any spurious books on the world : both which accusations are evidently true of our Christian writers in the first, and, as we commonly say, the purest, ages of Christianity. It is stranger still to observe how little regard the same persons pay, upon this head, even to the opinions of the greatest saints, and most learned men of their own church. I could quote many instances. Let one suffice. It shall be taken from St. AUSTIN, who, answering a passage of FAUSTUS the manichean, wherein he makes the belief of one Supreme Being the common badge  
of

of pagans, Jews, and Christians, does not allow indeed that the Christians took the opinion of a divine monarchy from the heathens; but is forced to allow that these were not so given up to false gods, as to lose the belief of the one true God, from whom every kind of nature proceeds \*.

THE polytheism, superstition, and idolatry of Egypt appear so monstrous in the light in which we view them, that they furnish the principal topics of every declamation against the theology of paganism: and yet I persuade myself that the knowledge and worship of God in his unity had prevailed even there in times unknown to us. Let it be considered that the Greeks, through whom all our profane anecdotes concerning this country have been conveyed, were not much acquainted with it, nor had resorted to it in search of knowledge till the reign of PSAMMITICHUS, that is, till seventeen or eighteen centuries after the establishment of this monarchy, dating this establishment only from MENES, and bringing him down as low as he is dragged by MARSHAM. THALES, SOLON, and PYTHAGORAS went thither nearly about the same time, in the reign of CROESUS at soonest; or in that of CAMBYSES at latest. By this chronology it appears, that an

\* — Gentes non usque adeo ad falsos deos esse dilapsas, ut opinionem amitterent unius veri Dei, ex quo est omnis qualiscunque natura. Lib. xx.

immense space of time, sufficient for many revolutions in religion and government, was elapsed before the Greeks had the means of being well informed about either: and the antiquities of Egypt might be as obscurely and imperfectly seen by these first philosophers, who went thither, as the Greek antiquities are by us. We may push this consideration farther: and suppose that the same polytheism, superstition, and idolatry that they found established in Egypt, were established there in the time of ORPHEUS, six or seven hundred years before, or even in the time of CECROPS, CADMUS, DANÆUS, or ERECTHEUS, who are said to have carried colonies, letters, and civil institutions into Greece two or three hundred years sooner than ORPHEUS carried religious rites and mysteries thither: and there will remain still, behind all these events, an antiquity more than sufficient for one revolution in theological opinions, and in religious worship at least, and perhaps for more than one.

I AM willing to grant more than EUSEBIUS, or any one else, has proved: and yet this concession will only thrust the æra of Egyptian polytheism and idolatry back into a greater antiquity. It will not give any grounds to assert, like EUSEBIUS, that the Egyptians were polytheists, and idolaters, or professed a sort of religious atheism from the beginning; nor that the Israelites alone knew and worshipped the true God. It may lead us, perhaps, to opinions very opposite to these, and  
much

much better founded on profane, for I shall not yet consider the sacred authority that is alledged for them, and that is more so in appearance than in reality. The more ancient the establishment of polytheism and idolatry in Egypt is agreed to have been, the stronger the argument grows, that may be drawn from those notices, that we have in our most authentic accounts of Egyptian theology, of a purer faith and worship. The belief of one supreme, invisible, and incomprehensible Being, the creator of all things, must have been once firmly settled in the minds of that people, when so many ages of prevalent polytheism and idolatry were not able to root it out, nor to efface the traces of the worship of him. Public profession, and practice, the outward system of religion, was altered, and the purity of it corrupted many ways, and by different motives. But nothing except conviction could have preserved, from time immemorial, in the secret theology or inward doctrine of the Egyptians, this fundamental article of all true religion, the existence of one Supreme Being, creator, and monarch of the universe: and this article was so preserved. Whatever errors the Egyptians, or their scholars the Greeks, admitted into their theology, this opinion tinged every theistical system: and even they who held the world to be eternal, like ARISTOTLE and others, held the world, and the deified parts of it, to be so, not as self-existent, but as eternal effects of an eternal cause. ARISTOTLE argues in his metaphysics against the folly of  
supposing

supposing more principles than one: and nothing can be more express than the doctrine of PLOTINUS on this point, where he distinguishes between priority in the order of time, and priority in the order of nature; and makes the world coeval with God no otherwise, than as light is conceived to be coeval with the sun.

THE belief of one Supreme Being may appear the more evidently to have been that of the Egyptians, publicly professed in the most ancient times of that monarchy, and held at all times in their secret theology, from this consideration, that it was brought from thence by the first of the Greeks, who went thither for instruction, and that the same doctrine was held by the last of those who had studied this philosophy. THALES and PYTHAGORAS, to say nothing of PLATO here, who came long after, brought it into Greece, disguised indeed under hieroglyphical and mystical representations, but yet too plainly taught to be mistaken for the contrary doctrine. ANAXAGORAS made a more public use of it by his writings, and has gone away with the honor of being the first of the Greeks who introduced a nous, or mind, into the cosmopoeia. THALES was of the same opinion as ANAXAGORAS: and EUSEBIUS quotes very unfairly what this philosopher said of water, as of the first principle of all things, without making any mention of that intelligence who framed all things of water according to THALES\*.

\* CIC. De nat. d. or. l. 1.



This notion of a fluid chaos, which we know to have been very general, by PLUTARCH and by other authorities, was very mosaical too, and points up to an Egyptian original. The founder of the ionic sect had it from thence most certainly; and MOSES too, if we give any credit to SIMPLICIUS, who scrupled not to declare, as I find him quoted by Dr. CUDWORTH, that the passages in the first of Genesis about the creation of the world were taken from Egyptian traditions. He called them fabulous, because he was a zealous asserter of the eternity of the world. But his authority will not make them pass for such. MOSES, who had been instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, might believe them true upon much better grounds. Nay more, he might be directed, if you please, by inspiration to take from them his belief of the beginning of things. Upon the whole, it is plain that the Supreme Being, the maker of the world, was acknowledged by the Egyptian theology at the first period that has been mentioned.

To prove that the same doctrine was derived from the same source, by the last of those who applied themselves to the study of Egyptian theology, I shall content myself to bring JAMBlichus forward; a very mysterious writer indeed, and yet plain enough to establish what we contend for. He answers the questions PORPHYRY had asked of ANEBO, under the name of ABAMMON the master of ANEBO. He was a Syrian, a very learned man, and much more capable, probably,  
than

than any Egyptian of that age, to give a body of their divinity. Now we learn by the eighth section of the book he wrote on this occasion, that the Egyptian philosophy supposed a multitude of essences, as they expressed themselves, and a multitude of different principles of these essences, from whence I am apt to think, that PYTHAGORAS borrowed his numbers, and PLATO his ideas. They carried their inquiries beyond all the bounds of human knowledge, and they disputed, as we do now, about words. But still it is manifest, that these essences, or principles, were deemed subordinate to the first cause; for before them all, and before their first god and king the sun, they acknowledged a Being, the fountain of all being, the root of all intelligible ideas. From this Being proceeded, according to this theology, “*ex plicuit se*” in GALE’s translation, that Being who is his own father, sufficient to himself, the God of gods, the father of essences, from whom all existence flows. This was the doctrine which MERCURIUS TRISMEGISTUS taught; and these were the principles he placed before the æthereal, empyreal, and celestial deities, concerning whom he wrote a great number of volumes. That this is a rhapsody of nonsense, I agree most readily. But it may not be less genuine for that, and it is sufficient for my purpose; since it establishes the unity of God even more precisely, and less mysteriously, than the athanasian creed.

THAT Greek metaphysical refinements helped  
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to render the Egyptian theology less intelligible, I shall not controvert; tho' he must pass for a dogmatical pedant, who presumes to affirm that they did so, and pretends to be a competent judge of the matter. But sure I am, that the orthodoxy of it, in this great point, is better proved by this quotation from JAMBLICHUS, than the supposed monstrous heterodoxy of it by any authority EUSEBIUS brings to justify his charge. He affirms very positively, in the third book of his Evangelical preparation, that no other gods, besides the stars, were acknowledged even in the hidden theology of the Egyptians; that the creation of the universe was ascribed to the visible sun alone; and all things depended, according to it, on fatal necessity, and on the influence of the stars, without the intervention of any incorporeal being, any efficient reason, God, gods, or invisible intelligent natures. To maintain this stout assertion he quotes a fragment of PORPHYRY's letter to ANEBO, and triumphs much in it, tho' it makes nothing to his purpose. It proves that CHAEREMON and some other writers had induced PORPHYRY to doubt concerning this article of the Egyptian creed, and that he writ to his priest to be informed of the truth. CHAEREMON was an Egyptian, and had been a priest, as ANEBO was: for neither the comic poet, nor any other of that name, can be the person intended, as it seems to me. PORPHYRY might possibly know nothing more of him: his authority, therefore, appeared suffi-

cient to make PORPHYRY inquire; but it was not sufficient to make EUSEBIUS affirm, in flat contradiction to so many better authorities, and even to his own in other places. This CHAEREMON, I believe, was he who had accompanied AELIUS GALLUS in his voyage from Alexandria higher up into Egypt, and had been derided for his ignorance and arrogance by the whole company. STRABO had been one of this company; and EUSEBIUS had read the seventeenth book of his Geography, without doubt, wherein an account is given of this important person. It is shameful, therefore, to see him quoted for the true notions of Egyptian theology. There were some philosophers and learned men in Egypt, very probably, in the time of CHAEREMON. But the colleges of those ancient philosophers, under whom EUDOXUS and PLATO had studied, were desert; or if they remained, they were become seminaries of priests, who took care of sacrifices, performed the other rites of superstition, exercised all the craft of their order, and took no pains to improve themselves and others in knowledge. EUSEBIUS should have remembered that, if CHAEREMON's authority was good against the Egyptians, it was of some force and weight against the Jews; which he would have been as unwilling to admit as JOSEPHUS, who accused CHAEREMON for this reason of imposture, unless he had avowed in this case a maxim, which he and JOSEPHUS have done little else than avow in others, that the same testimony is good when it makes

makes for them, and bad when it makes against them. EUSEBIUS should have remembered, when he derided the comment of PORPHYRY on the verses attributed to ORPHEUS, and when he asked how the author, whoever he was, could sing of God, or mean that efficient mind that created the universe, who had never heard of any such doctrine; he should have remembered, I say, that he begged the question, and supposed what he had not proved against the Pagans.

It has been observed already, that the unity of a Supreme Being must have been once a first principle of Egyptian religion, since it pierced through such an immense series of polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. Here we may observe to the same purpose, that all the metaphysical and theological refinements of Egypt and Greece were not able to remove this angular stone of true theism. When metaphysics and theology are made sciences, and these sciences become the professions of orders of men, who increase their consideration in the world, or advance their temporal interests, by creating an appearance of mystery where there is none, or by increasing it where it is, the simplicity of religion will be lost of course, and natural theology will be transformed into artificial. We may find examples to confirm this truth in the Christian system: and I much doubt whether the evangelists would understand the epistles of St. PAUL, tho' one of them was his scribe, or St. PAUL the works of St. AUSTIN,

tho' the saint took so much of his theology from the apostle. This happened in the Egyptian system of religion; but this fundamental article, the unity of God, was preserved, tho' darkened and perplexed by the engraftments made upon it. Such were those which may be found in PLATO, and in the latter Platonicians; such were those which I have, and others which I might have cited from JAMBlichus. But in all of them the existence of a Supreme Being, the Being of beings, the God of gods, the fountain of all existence, the root of all intelligible ideas, was acknowledged.

MAY one not think, without being too hypothetical, that we see, in the anecdote PLUTARCH\* relates concerning the belief and worship of the people of the Theban dynasty, the last stage of orthodox faith, and of natural religion in Egypt? They adored the "one God eternal, invisible, not like to any visible objects, nor to be represented by them." I use Mr. LOCKE's words, for if he had intended to describe this faith and worship from PLUTARCH, he could not have done it more exactly; and yet this is the description of that God who was not known, according to him, till the light of the gospel manifested him to the world. He might have asserted just as truly, that no men but the Jews knew how to read and write before the coming of Christ; because ~~the~~

\* De ISIDE et OSIRIDE.

ny of them knew it ill, as they do to this day, and some of them did not know it at all,

At what time the true God was thus publicly known and worshipped in the upper Egypt, it is impossible to determine. But we see in the history ascribed to MOSES, that he was known in the lower Egypt, and the neighbouring country of the Chanaanites, in the days of ABRAHAM. The adventures of this patriarch and his son, when their wives were taken from them, are told in several chapters of Genesis a little confusedly ; but however they serve to establish this fact. No man, who reads the twentieth chapter of Genesis, can doubt, whether it was the true God, or not, of whom the author meant to speak, and who appeared to the first of the ABIMELECHS in his sleep. It has been said, I know, on this occasion, that God manifested himself sometimes to those who were not in his alliance, or covenant, but that he did this always for the sake of his own people. He did it then, at this time, to preserve SARAH's chastity. Be it so. But still he manifested himself on this important occasion. The king of Gerar knows him, and appeals to his justice. God is pleased to declare that the king's intentions were not criminal, and that he had therefore kept him from the commission of the sin : a very unnecessary restraint, surely, since the king did not intend to commit it, since his intentions were not criminal. God commands, the king obeys, ABRAHAM inter-

cedes, and ABIMELECH is restored to the power of begetting, and his wife and his concubines to the power of conceiving, children. The same, or which is more likely, some other ABIMELECH had taken warning, and therefore as soon as he knew that REBECCA was the wife of ISAAC, he threatened death to any man who should presume to lie with her, and bring so great a sin on him and his people. He followed ISAAC to Bersabea, and there this king, his minister, and his general desired to make a solemn league with him, because they knew that the Lord was with him\*. The reason they gave to induce him to consent, was not only that they had done no hurt to him, nor his, but that they had sent him from Gerar with the blessing of the Lord†. Is the true God pointed more directly out any where in the same book? Do not the ABIMELECHS acknowledge him, and conduct themselves, on this occasion, as one of the patriarchs might have done?

MELCHISEDECH must not be forgot in this place. A thousand idle guesses have been made, and various fables invented, about him. St. PAUL, in his epistle to the Hebrews, shews great cabalistical skill on this subject; and grounds on such forced allusions, as might pass in the school of GAMALIEL, the least conclusive reasoning that was ever heard out of it. The book of Genesis says little of this king and priest, but enough to

\* Tecum esse Dominum.

† Dimissimus auctum benedictione Domini. Gen. cap. xxvi.



shew that the true God was known to others besides the Jewish line of patriarchs, and before the Israelites were a people. He was of Egyptian race, as some have asserted without any grounds, I believe, of history or tradition, but not without an air, at least, of probability. In all cases he was priest of the most high God as well as king of Salem. As such he blessed ABRAHAM; as such the father of the faithful received his blessing; as such he paid him the tithes of his plunder, which is a title, by the way, for carrying the divine right of tithes farther than the moderation of the church has hitherto carried it\*. Since he was a priest of the true God, as well as king of Salem, or Jerusalem, are we to believe that his subjects were all idolaters? The supposition cannot be reconciled to common sense: and, since it cannot, sure I am that the propositions I combat cannot be so, nay I have the authority of the Bible on my side. I shall have it so again before I have done.

IF I would proceed now, as learned men presume to do very frequently, and without the least scruple, I might venture to affirm, on these foundations a little extended and improved, not only that the true God was known by the Egyptians and by some of the people of Palestine before the vocation of ABRAHAM, but that this patriarch, who became the father of the faithful,

\* What is here said, is said on the authority of St. PAUL; for, if we believe MOSES, it may be that MELCHISEDECH paid tithes to ABRAHAM.

tho' said to have been bred an idolater, learned this orthodox faith in Egypt, and the neighbouring countries, if he was so bred in his own. But I am not scholar enough to presume to affirm on wild conjecture. I dare go no farther than sufficient probability leads me, and sufficient vouchers support me. With these on my side, I might go on to shew, that the unity of a Supreme God was taught both by the Chaldeans, and the magi; and might rest on the proofs brought by CUDWORTH in his Intellectual system, by HIDE in his Treatise concerning the religion of the ancient Persians, and by other authors, leaving critics, who are not able to subvert the systems of these writers, to nibble at some particular circumstances. But I choose to leap at once to the extremity of the east, and to shew by anecdotes less common, that a nation, lately known, had, in as great, or even a greater, antiquity, the same faith.

THE nation I mean is the Chinese, who will not be suspected, one would think, of having had any communication with the Israelites, tho' I would not answer for such antiquaries as HUE-RIUS, nor others of that stamp. The Chinese have their pentateuch as well as the Jews, and one volume of it is as old as FOHI, the founder of their empire. Two other volumes contain records as old at least as the deluge, and the two last are collections from other ancient monuments published by CONFUCIUS, who lived six hundred years before CHRIST, and was therefore elder  
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than ESDRAS. The Chinese scholars, as proud of the antiquity of their nation as ever any of those who disputed formerly about theirs could be, might disregard our most ancient traditions, and look on MOSES as a modern historian. They might found their incredulity on their credulity, and their positiveness on their ignorance; which is the general case of bigots in the west, as well as in the east. But for us, who have the happiness to live in this enlightened age, and who pretend to examine every thing, and to judge according to evidence, we should have no good grace to reject the classical books of the Chinese. They come to us upon as good original authority as that of the Jews, they contain as few things that are repugnant to the general observation and experience of mankind as any other ancient records, and much fewer than some; and they have been preserved in a manner that gives them a singular authenticity, into which I will not enter, because it would lead me far, and might cause some invidious comparisons \*.

THIS authenticity is so well established, that the atheists in China are forced to submit to it; and tho' their advantage would be to reject these books, they endeavour by all the artifice of sophistry to drag a meaning out of them, which may seem to set the opinion of antiquity on their side. The ancient sages among the Chinese, like those of other nations, delivered their doc-

\* Vid. Scien. fin. etc.

trines in short apophthegms, in parables and allegories. They who followed were not so laconic: but even they dealt much in figure; and, allegory allegorising allegory very often by way of explanation, the sense, which was at first obscure, grew to be worse than obscure, it grew to be litigious. The paraphrases and commentaries multiplied, the disputes increased, and the labor on every side has been to confirm different and opposite opinions, by different explications of the same text. The language, as well as genius, of this people has helped to increase the confusion, not so much indeed as if these books had passed through several languages; but still a great deal from the scarcity of words and the necessity of supplying this defect, when they speak by numberless inflections and tones of voice, and when they write by numberless points and accents.

A JESUIT, who restored the mission in the last century, after it had been some time interrupted by the authority of the government, took a method which it is to the present purpose to mention. He engaged in the dispute that was carried on between the theists and the atheists; and maintained, in concert with the former, that the ancient Chinese believed and worshipped one God. This God, the God of their fathers, denied by some, forgot by more, and almost unknown, he declared to be the God whose revelation, and whose will, he came to publish  
among

among them. Neither he, nor those who followed him have made many real converts to Christianity, nor persuaded that people to believe that his religion was in former times established amongst them, tho' many pious frauds have been employed for that purpose. But in the other part there has been less difficulty, and more success; for the state of the dispute seems to have stood thus.

A BEING called XAM TI, which words signify the Supreme King, appears in all their ancient books to have been worshipped as the dispenser of temporal good and evil to mankind. Fohi offered victims, and Hoam Ti built a temple, to this divinity. From this time, that is, from an æra anterior to any of ours, the same worship continued, together with religious rites practised in honor of inferior spirits\*, who are sometimes called the ministers of the Supreme King, and who are said by one of the interpreters of CONFUCIUS to exercise their offices "in hoc coeli et terrae medio," to bring blessings on the good, and punishments on the wicked. The book Xu Kim says expressly, that their great emperor and legislator XUN sacrificed to XAM TI, and to the six principal spirits. Another classical book mentions a very ancient edict, by which all the people are commanded to pay honor to the Supreme Emperor of heaven, and likewise to the spirits; that the spirits

\* Vide CONFUC.

may intercède for the happiness of the people, “*ut pro populo flagitarent felicitatem.*” Such passages, and a multitude of others to the like effect, are found in ancient books of the Chinese, as we learn from the Jesuits, from whom alone we can have any tolerable information; and it should seem that such authorities were sufficient to decide the controversy, and to leave no doubt whether the ancient people of this country believed a God, or were atheists. But the men of letters among them at this time profess a sort of spinozism, to which they endeavour to reconcile these passages, and there are many examples in the *Scientia sinica* of the extravagant paraphrases they make for this purpose.

THE atheists insist, and the theists admit, that the word *Tien*, which signifies heaven, is frequently used now, and was so anciently, as synonymous to the words *Xam Ti*. What the atheists would infer from thence is obvious, but by no means conclusive. Their forefathers imagined, as I believe that all the ancient people of the world did, and as almost all the people of the world do still, that the habitation of God, and all celestial beings, was above that canopy which appeared to be spread over their heads, and which they called heaven. From hence the custom arose of employing the word which signifies the place of residence, for the word that denotes the being who is supposed to reside in it. But the argument, that results from the  
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promiscuous use of these words, will turn, according to my apprehension, directly against the use which the atheist would make of it. If the ancient Chinese had acknowledged no higher principle than matter and form, no supreme intelligent Being, the words Xam Ti, far from being used as synonymous to the word Tien, would never have come into use at all. A man who should say at Peking, China declared war against the Tartars, or the emperor of China did so, would speak as intelligibly as a man at London would do, who should say Great Britain, or the king of Great Britain, declared war against France. But the same manner of speaking cannot obtain in a country that has neither emperor, nor king; and no Dutchman ever said indifferently this Holland did, or this the king of Holland did. This argument must be the stronger in the mouths of Chinese theists, because in the same books, wherein the words we have mentioned are thus used, the separate existence of the spirits of mountains, rivers, and cities, and of the seasons, the sun, the moon, and the planets, is taught: and yet these separate spirits, and the things over which they preside, are spoken of with the same licence. They are called indifferently the spirit of the mountain, or of the river, and the mountain, or the river; nay, the very same words that are employed to signify the fortifications of a city are employed to signify the tutelary spirits of that city. On the whole, we may conclude that a Supreme being was known

to the ancient Chinese, tho' superstition, idolatry, and atheism have been so prevalent among that people since. The sacrifices performed with so much order and pomp, so much reverence and religious awe, the fasts, the purifications, and the other acts of divine worship which were practised, were not performed and practised surely in honor of matter and form, nor directed to these vague ideas of the human mind. The emperesses who nourished silk-worms, and weaved ornaments for the altars; the emperors who ploughed and sowed annually, and raised by the sweat of their brows the fruits of the earth, which they offered on those altars, acknowledged without doubt some other divinity than TAI KIE, and LI. Thus we must think, unless we can be as absurd as EUSEBIUS, and figure to ourselves a sort of religious atheists, who acknowledging no deity besides dead and senseless matter, yet worshipped it, invoked it, and implored its assistance. But this sottishness and contradictory nonsense CUDWORTH cannot believe incident to human nature \*, and I presume to think that most men will be of the same mind.

## S E C T I O N II.

**T**HE particular proofs that have been brought, or to which I have referred, in this and the foregoing essay, are sufficient to destroy the credit of the assertions to which they

\* Intell. system.



are opposed. But it may be proper to shew farther, that if there were no such particular proofs of the acknowledgment of the one true God by other nations besides the Israelites, yet the assumption, that he was acknowledged by them alone, and that all other nations were polytheists and idolaters from the beginning, would deserve to be rejected for its absurdity; since it will be found inconsistent with the tenor of the mosaical history, when we take scripture for our guide, and with all the rules of judgment that observation, experience, and good sense suggest to us, when we consider the human character and the course of human affairs. I am not surprised when I meet in BOCHART with such an assertion as this boldly advanced, that “there was no church before the deluge except in the family of SETH;” and that after the deluge, till the coming of CHRIST, God made himself known to no people except to those who were of the race of SEM\*.” But when I meet with such assertions as I have quoted from Mr. LOCKE, in an author who lays aside the comments and systems of divines, and betakes himself to the sole reading of the scriptures, I confess myself surprised to the last degree at the weakness of the strongest minds.

WE have nothing to do here with the antediluvian world. We leave the ecclesiastical history of it to BOCHART, and the natural to

\* Geog. Sac. lib. i. c. 1.

BURNET. But if we consult the Bible for what passed after the deluge, and is to our present purpose, we shall find that the knowledge of the one true God, derived to NOAH from ADAM by uninterrupted succession, and confirmed to him by many particular revelations, must have been common to him, and to his family, as much as those particular precepts which he is said to have received from the mouth of God, and which are called *precepta noachidarum*. The sons of NOAH, therefore, when they dispersed themselves to re-people the world, must have carried this knowledge with them, and have communicated it to their descendants, in all the settlements they made, and in all the colonies that were propagated from these.

THIS is so evident that it would suffer no dispute in any similar case: and yet, for reasons not hard to find, nor proper to avow, it is denied in this. LACTANTIUS says \*, that HAM the son of NOAH settled in Arabia; and that, not having received the worship of God by tradition from his father, the nation he founded was the first that knew not God. A strange assertion indeed, and such an one as cannot be true, if the sacred history be so. We read there †, that the patriarch lying drunk and naked in his tent, and this ungracious son seeing him in that indecent condition, he told it to his brothers; that SEM and JAPHET went reverently backwards, saw not

\* De orig. Er. c. 4.

† Gen. ix.

their

their father's nudity †, and threw a cloak over him. After this, NOAH pronounced the prophetic curse against CHANAAN, the son of HAM, who was to be the servant of the servants of his brothers ||: and this prophecy, it is said by BOCHART and others, had it's completion when the Chanaanites were subdued by the Israelites. But whatever criticisms good or bad may be made on it, and whatever reflections the punishment of CHANAAN, who had no share in his father's crime, may suggest, this gave the Israelites the sole title they had to the land of promise by the grant God made of it to the posterity of ABRAHAM, and was employed to justify all the cruelties they exercised on the Chanaanites.

THIS unfortunate person was not only punished in his race, as the prophecy threatened, but his name and memory are cruelly persecuted to this day by the unrelenting wrath of Jewish and Christian writers. Some have accused him of gelding his father, and some of committing incest with his mother. He was banished, they say, to the scorching climate of Africa, and the color of his posterity is a lasting monument of the blackness of his crimes. He not only preserved and propagated the necromancy which he had learned of the lascivious angels before the deluge \*, but he became himself an object of ido-

† *Patris virilia non viderunt.*

|| *Servus fervorum erit fratribus suis.*

\* BOCHART. *Geog. sac. lib. iv. c. 1.*

latry, as he had been an idolater, and was worshipped under the name of JUPITER HAMMON. They who can believe all this, may believe that polytheism and idolatry were established immediately after the deluge. But they, who are not quite so credulous, will see that such opinions are irreconcilable to the scriptures, and to common sense. NOAH might be as angry as he pleased with his reprobate son, and might conceal from him as many traditions as he could; yet still this son had been an eye-witness of the deluge, he had been saved with the rest of the family in the ark, he had assisted his father without doubt in building it, and in making all the other preparations for that great catastrophe, as well as for the renewal of the species of animals, and the restoration of things afterwards. Is it possible to conceive that he should not have heard, whilst they floated together over the drowned world, who that God was by whose power it was drowned, and what those crimes were which had drawn this astonishing destruction on mankind? It is impossible. His father could not conceal this knowledge from him. HAM knew the one true God most certainly, and had often joined in the worship of him. He could no more be ignorant of God, than he could be of the deluge.

THIS is so very plain, that it cannot be directly, nor generally, denied, whatever expressions may be sometimes used by men whom learn-

ing emboldens, and zeal is apt to transport. But then the chronology, founded on the genealogies in the book of Genesis, supposes the tradition of these revelations, by which God communicated himself to man, to have been preserved so little a time after the deluge, that it gives a color to suppose all the nations of the world, nay even the descendants of SEM, ignorant of the one true God : and on this assumption, presumptuous dogmatical persons, who affect to be in the whole secret of the divine oeconomy, establish the reason that they assign by another assumption for the election and separation of the posterity of ABRAHAM from all other people. Infinite wisdom, it seems, could contrive no other expedient for continuing the primitive faith and worship, for such that of the one true God was by these accounts, among the descendants of one family that had repeopled the earth, except this of reviving them, and continuing them by such a series of revelations and miracles among one people, as would have made any revival of them unnecessary among any other ; because they would have been more than sufficient to continue them uncorrupted over the whole world, not only till the vocation of ABRAHAM, four hundred years after the deluge, not only till the coming of the Messiah, two thousand years after that, but even to this hour, and to the consummation of all things.

SOME place the æra of idolatry precisely at SE-

RUG, who was three generations older than ABRAHAM. SIR JOHN MARSHAM thinks it a very proper date\*. A probable one I am sure it is not; nor indeed a proper one for any purpose, except that of making mankind idolaters just in time for introducing the vocation of ABRAHAM. This might render it proper for EUSEBIUS, EPIPHANIUS, and all the tribe of Jews and Christians, who have employed every literary artifice to confine the knowledge and worship of God to the chosen seed, and to represent them as the sole object of providential care for twenty centuries. But I think that the learned and judicious chronicler has not deserved to be ranked among this partial and collusive tribe. We might call them the blind tribe too, since they must not have seen (unless you suppose that they saw, but depended on the blindness of a then ignorant world) that this knowledge and worship could not have been as confined as they suppose it from the time of the flood, unless God had by one continued miracle concealed himself to establish the kingdom of the devil, and altered the very nature of things to make so important, so universal, so indisputable a tradition die before it's time, and, as we may say, at once.

WHEN the same persons attempt to establish the credibility of the mosaical history, they do not insist alone upon the divine inspiration of the au-

\* Can. chron. fac. 4.

thor but upon the ordinary means that he had of knowing, with the greatest certainty, all that we find related in the pentateuch. These means were the traditions which they suppose to have come fresh and authentic to him through a very small number of generations, tho' from a very great antiquity. ADAM lived nine hundred and thirty years; and the deluge happened sixteen centuries and an half after the creation. NOAH therefore, who was born six hundred years before the deluge, had lived with those who had lived with the first of men. NOAH continued alive three hundred and fifty years after the deluge, that is, within seventy six years of the vocation of ABRAHAM; and SEM the son of NOAH died just as many years after this vocation. From ABRAHAM the traditions passed to ISAAC, and from him to JACOB; and all the persons who had conversed with this patriarch could not be dead in the course of a century, which intervenes between the decease of JACOB and the birth of MOSES. Thus you see that the traditions from ADAM, to this legislator and historian, passed through about seven generations, and from NOAH to ABRAHAM, and his cotemporaries, through one or two at most, according to this chronology.

LET us take now this chronology for good, whatever objections may be made to it, or how precarious soever the principles of it deserve to be esteemed. But then let us ask every man of

sense and candor who receives it, whether he can persuade himself that in the days of ABRAHAM, about four hundred years after the deluge, nay much sooner, in the days of SERUG, the existence of that God who had destroyed and restored the world, in so astonishing a manner just before, could be wholly lost in the memory of mankind? I say just before, with very good reason; because the distance of three or four centuries, when the lives of men were reckoned by centuries, may be called properly "just before." The deluge was an event as modern to ABRAHAM and the men of that age, as the restoration of king CHARLES the second is to us of this age. Could the belief and worship of God be lost by the descendants of SEM, an hundred years before the death of SEM? Could they be lost even during the life of NOAH? Is it possible to figure to ourselves the children of these holy patriarchs professing polytheism, and practising idolatry, under the eyes of their fathers; and ABRAHAM, for instance, educated in the religion of the Zabians, a new name given by our learned men to the Chaldeans, after Mahometan writers, whilst SEM was still alive? Once more: Is it credible in the lowest degree of credibility, that the Chaldeans, who were able to give CALLISTHENES, two thousand years after the flood, astronomical observations of as great a number of years at least, should know nothing of the flood, of the occasion, of the author of it, in a word, of the true God, in less than four centuries  
after



after it had happened? These improbabilities are so very monstrous, that it is marvellous any men should be hardy enough to impose them, or silly enough to believe them. When MAIMONIDES is gravely quoted to prove TERAH an idolater, I let my book fall with astonishment. As soon would I quote NAVARETTE, a Spanish missionary, to prove that the first coin, of which we have any knowledge, is that made by TERAH the father of ABRAHAM, at the request of king NINUS, and for thirty pieces of which JUDAS sold his master.

I KNOW that JOSHUA is introduced in the twenty fourth chapter of the book ascribed to him, speaking in the name of God to the children of Israel, and telling them that TERAH, the father of ABRAHAM and NACHOR, had served strange gods. Now that here and there a man might begin to corrupt the worship of the true God, even in these early days, is just credible. But that the true God should be unknown, and idolatry established, at that time, is what I affirm to be incredible. Let commentators puzzle over the text, or take the fact as they find it without any examination, it will become other men to believe that something has happened to the Jewish records, like that which happened to those of another ancient people, the Phenicians; and that if the scribes of the former have not corrupted their history, as PHILO BYBLIUS, who published a Greek translation of SANCHONIA-

THON in the reign of ADRIAN, complains that the priests of the latter had corrupted theirs ; we may suppose at least, as some even of the Jewish doctors have done, that the genealogies of the Bible, far from being complete, are imperfect abstracts ; or that they have been compiled, as father FOUQUET, at his return from China, where he had resided three and twenty years, assured me that the chronological table in the *Scientia sinica* had been. This table is composed of cycles of threescore years each, and all these cycles appear to us unbroken. But the learned Jesuit averred, that in the originals many of them wanted the beginning, and many of them the end. So that the space of time to which this table refers could not be shorter, but might be immeasurably longer, than the chronological table his brethren had put together represents it. In a word, it will become reasonable men to assume any hypothesis rather, than to believe, against universal experience, the least disputable analogy, and the plainest dictates of common sense, that the knowledge and worship of God were entirely forgot, whilst the preachers of both, and the eye-witnesses of the deluge, were still alive.

LET us believe, on the authority of MOSES, that God, trusting neither to the impressions of himself that are visible on the whole face of nature, nor to the reason he gave to man, communicated this knowledge, and directed this

worship, by immediate revelations. But let us not be so absurd as to believe, on any authority, that so many signal revelations, and astonishing miracles, attested by evidence unquestionable, and delivered down by immediate, not remote, tradition, could be forgot so soon; nor that they could be remembered, and the great truths they communicated and confirmed, be forgot. All these must have continued strongly impressed on the minds of men much longer, even in the ordinary course of things. They must have continued to be so not only in the countries where the re-peopling of the world began, but wherever the founders of nations led their colonies from thence: which they began to do in the days of PHALEG, that is, about a century after the flood. If we believe, on the authority of MOSES, that God made himself known by revelations and miracles to all the men that were at a certain time in the world, and from whom all the nations of the world descended; we cannot believe, on the same authority, because we cannot believe consistently with it, that his being and his worship were unknown to any of these, or forgot by any of them in the course of a very few years. The same authority would be made thus to contradict itself. In the case of another history we should say that neither might be true. But in the case of this we may say that both cannot. The first is a plain, independent fact, that must be reputed true on the whole, whatever disputes may arise about circumstances,

or the history must be reputed fabulous. But the other depends on a chronology very liable to mistakes, and not affecting the truth of the former. That famous astronomer, CASSINI, took the pains to calculate backwards a remarkable eclipse or two, that are mentioned in the ancient Chinese annals. He found that such eclipses had been, but the dates were not exact. Just so we find that the one true God was eclipsed, if I may use this expression; but tho' the eclipse lasted long, and lasts to this hour in some parts of the world, it could not begin so early, nor spread so universally, as some men would induce us to believe. Will it be said that the confusion of languages, which began at once in the plains of Sennaar, and was followed by the dispersion of mankind into all the parts of the earth, as the story is generally, tho' erroneously, understood, interrupted or corrupted tradition, and gave occasion to the immediate establishment of polytheism and idolatry? But the argument to be drawn from this famous event will prove the very contrary. Tho' languages were confounded, memory was not destroyed; and the knowledge which had been common to all men whilst they lived together, and formed but one community, was continued, and delivered down in different languages, after this division. The knowledge was dispersed, as those who had it were dispersed; and the same truths were taught then, as they are now, in different tongues. Nay farther, this very confusion, and the dispersion of mankind,

mankind, which were brought about in so miraculous a manner, and by an immediate act of the same omnipotent being who had so lately destroyed, and now restored, the world, would have become, if this had been the case, the strongest confirmations imaginable of the truths that were known before; and with the renewal and confirmation of these truths in their minds, the sons of men would have settled themselves in several countries, and have given beginnings to the several nations. Among these, therefore, and in opposition to truths so well known, and so signally confirmed, it was not possible that the zabians, and the magians, and every other sect of idolaters, should arise, till by a long tract of time, and a multitude of revolutions in the affairs of mankind, true primitive traditions, and genuine theism, began to decay together. Then, and not till then, might priestcraft prevail, which Mr. LOCKE esteems an 'obstacle to the progress of true religion, and which I believe, on principles founded in the mosaical history, to have been the great corrupter of it after it had been established. I might easily illustrate and confirm these opinions, which are both true relatively to different times, and different places, by examples drawn from history, and even from the experience of our own age; from what passes in countries where the propagation of Christianity is attempted by missions, and in those where this religion is already established.

SOMETHING stronger than this may be objected to me. It may be said, that whilst I argue on probable reasons, and endeavour to shew that the true God, and the true worship of him, could not be forgot, nor polytheism and idolatry be established, as soon as they are said to have been, among the nations of the world; I do not enough consider what passed among God's chosen people, in instances where no supposition of anachronism will help me to evade the force of scripture authority. Some pert divine may bid me descend a little lower in the history of the Bible, and learn there how short the duration was, even among this people, of those impressions which revelations and miracles should have rendered permanent, and almost indelible, according to me, even among the other people of the world, who were left to walk in their own ways. I do so again, as I have done already often, and I find that the posterity of ABRAHAM, or the children of ISRAEL, as they were called, after that some mysterious person or other had changed the name of JACOB, who wrestled him at wrestling, into that of ISRAEL; I say, I find that they were become idolaters before their deliverance out of Egypt, confirmed, hardened idolaters, and so accustomed to the manners, and wedded to the superstitions of the Egyptians, that however MOSES drew them forth as a separate people, there seemed to be, as EUSEBIUS \*

\* Praep. evan. lib. vii. c. 8.

himself confesses it happened he knew not how, no perceivable difference between them and the Egyptians. This may well appear the more surprising, if it be true, according to the common reckoning, that JACOB died less than two centuries before the exode, that JOSEPH died about fifty years after his father, and that LEVI had not been dead so long when AARON was born, and MOSES after him. How this could happen, neither EUSEBIUS was able to account, nor is any man else. Dr. SPENCER \* takes pains to prove the fact: and it is something odd to see the authority of EUSEBIUS and THEODORET, of MAIMONIDES, and R. JUDA superfluously employed to confirm what the Bible had proved in several places to his hand. But when he goes about to reconcile the fact to some notion of reasonable probability, he succeeds still worse, and does as much too little, as he had done more than enough. The learned writer thinks that, if this people had been treated in a better manner by the Egyptians, they could however have hardly avoided taking up the barbarous manners of that nation to which they had been so long accustomed. But he argues, *à fortiori*, that this was inevitable, because they endured a cruel servitude in Egypt, and because such a servitude renders men little attentive to religious matters, and disposes them to conform to the manners and genius of their

\* De leg. Heb. rit. lib. i. c. 1.

masters \*. Now the very reverse of this maxim and this reasoning seems to me to be true. The fear of stripes may produce, whilst it continues, such a conformity in outward shew, but it can dispose men inwardly to embrace the manners and opinions, religious, or others, of their tyrants, no more than it can dispose them to love their persons : and even the appearance of such a conformity will cease whenever the slavish estate ceases. It will not only cease, but the slaves become freemen will throw off every badge of their slavery, and prefer the manners and opinions of those especially by whom they are delivered, to such as they professed through fear, when they were under the lash of their taskmasters, “*pugnis fustibusque saevientes* †.” Tyranny may make hypocrites, it can never make proselytes. Whoever has studied the human nature, and been careful to observe the course of human affairs, must think it repugnant to both, not only that the Israelites should forget the traditions of their fathers, and the God of ABRAHAM, of ISAAC, and of JACOB, in so short a time, but that they should have been as much wedded to idolatry, as the Egyptians themselves were.

BUT if this be strange, it is stranger still to observe how little effect revelations of public

\* *Tam servilis autem, et infelix vivendi conditio, hominum animos angustos reddere solet, rerum coelestium cura vacuos, et in dominorum suorum mores et ingenia pronos.*  
SPENCER ubi supra. † Ibid.



notoriety, occasional, and constant or standing, miracles before the exode, at the exode, in the wilderness, in the promised land, under their judges, and under their kings, had on the same people. They forgot the true God, even whilst he conducted them visibly through the desert. They revolted from him whilst the peals of thunder, that proclaimed his descent on the mountain, rattled in their ears, and whilst he dictated his laws to them. All the power that omnipotence could exert was not sufficient to revive in the minds of this stubborn generation the faith and piety of their fathers, nor a due and lasting sense of that religion which they had certainly followed, for some time at least, after their settlement in Egypt\*: and Dr. SPENCER therefore might have termed their manners barbarous with much more reason than he applied that epithet to those of the Egyptians. As the means of conviction, and the motives of submission to the religion that MOSES instituted, continued, and increased, so did the indocility, and apparent incredulity, of this elect people. Neither the promises nor the threatenings, the rewards nor the punishments, by which God endeavoured to attach them to himself; neither his condescension in wearing their crown, and in governing them like an earthly monarch till they deposed him, nor his constant

\* *Israëlitas, sub prima incolatus aegyptiaci tempora, scientiae divinae lampadam a patribus acceptam habuisse, e religionem avitam integram et illibatam diu tenuisse, nobis facile persuadeamus. Ibid.*

residence, even after his deposition, among them, could succeed. They were proof against miracles to such a degree, that there would not have been more room for surprize, if we had been told, that NOAH and his family served strange gods even in the ark, than there is to find, in the history of this people, that they revolted back to idolatry nine hundred years together on every occasion. This history, in short, contains many particular miracles which operated effectually against the ordinary course of nature, physical and moral : and at the same time the whole thread of it is a system of miracles ineffectually operated for a purpose so natural, that every one of them seems to make the next unnecessary.

IF the divine now should ask me, after all that I have owned in favor of his argument, whether that, which happened at and after the exode, might not happen after the deluge ? whether the families that repeopled the earth at this period might not forget the true God, and his worship, immediately after it, notwithstanding any traditions, as we see that God's chosen and favorite people did during their bondage in Egypt ; and as they continued to do very frequently from that time till the Babylonian captivity, notwithstanding the miraculous advertisements, and the interpositions of providence ever watchful to prevent these apostasies ? if the divine, I say, should ask me such questions, my answer would be this : The history of the Bible tells me, that these things  
 passed

passed as I have represented them. But I know that they are repugnant to universal experience, and I have a conscious certainty that they are so to the human nature. Look into the history of the world, reverend sir, and you will find too many examples of pretended revelations, of forged miracles, and of groundless traditions, that have prevailed among mankind from age to age, to leave it in your power to think that unexceptionable revelations, real miracles, and certain traditions, could be ever ineffectual. Nothing less than the greatest of all miracles could make them so: and who should work such a miracle? Not God, most certainly; for those which were disappointed of their effect, you say, were wrought by him. Was it then the devil? But how came he to have such a power, and to be suffered to exert it in such a case? I know farther, most intuitively, that no creature of the same nature as I am of, and I presume the Israelites were human creatures, could resist the evidence of such revelations, such miracles, and such traditions as are recorded in the Bible. Look into yourself, reverend sir, and you will find it to be so. God appearing in all the terrors of his majesty, and his prophets denouncing judgments which were instantly, and literally fulfilled, to mention these particulars alone out of many, must have roused the most stupid, have terrified the most audacious, and have convinced the most incredulous.

SUCH an answer as this might procure me in return some ecclesiastical billingsgate. I might be called infidel, deist, and perhaps atheist. I should be accused certainly of disbelieving the holy scriptures. My reply to so angry a disputant would be calm, and such as might teach charity to those who preach it so much, and practise it so little. "*Ne sœvi, magne sacerdos.*" I do not so much deny the truth of the facts related, as I oppose the application, and the use made of them. You argue from the conduct of the Israelites to that of other nations; and would persuade us, that all these might be polytheists and idolaters from the beginning, because the true God and his worship were forgot so soon, and so often by his chosen people. But I deny that any such analogy will hold good. The Israelites were a people set apart from the rest of mankind, and indeed so set apart, and so distinguished, that the proceedings of God towards them, and their behaviour towards God, and towards man, make all together such a series of history as can be compared with no other; such an history as shews us this people, but leads us to judge by analogy of no other. In profane history we acquire experience of mankind, and of human affairs. The benefit we reap from it consists in this, and by this general knowledge we judge of every particular history that we read. In sacred history we acquire none of this experience. It is the history of a people not only set apart from the great community of mankind, but

in many respects taken out, as it were, of the human system. To make the events recorded in it serve as foundations, therefore, of the judgments we pass on those that may have happened among other people, is just as absurd as it would be to make a collection of miracles, that is, of events out of the ordinary course of nature, and even repugnant to it, serve as the foundation of natural and experimental philosophy.

LET us believe then what is in the Bible, because it is there: not, like TERTULLIAN, because it is impossible, or absurd; but altho' it be improbable, or inconsistent. At the same time let us not apply the extraordinary events that we find there to such as happen in the ordinary course of human affairs. Much less let us apply our own observation and experience, by which we judge very properly of other histories, to that of the Bible. That of the Bible must stand on the bottom of its own authority, independently of all other: and I am persuaded that nothing has shaken this authority more, than the silly attempts of some writers to confirm it by arguments drawn from the reason of things, that is, from a comparison of ideas derived from human observation and experience. It seems to me, that divines should rest the authority both of the Old and New Testament on the proofs they are able to bring of their divine original, and of the uncorrupt manner in which they have been conveyed down to latter ages, solely.

To establish the credit of other histories, for I consider the Bible here only as an history, it is not indeed sufficient to ascertain the authors of them; because these authors, being men, may have been deceived, or may have designed to deceive. For this reason their internal, as well as external, proofs of authenticity are examined, and they are received, or rejected, as they appear consistent or inconsistent, conformable or repugnant, to the observation and experience of mankind. But this second examination is unnecessary when the question is about the word of God, known to be such by evidence superior to all contradiction, or it is impertinent and profane. If we could suppose the authenticity and divine original of the scriptures destitute of sufficient external proof, this deficiency would not be supplied by all the skill of those who pretend to discover, by their superior penetration, the internal proofs. If the authenticity and divine original of them be, on the contrary, sufficiently established by external proof, it is both impertinent and profane to pretend to confirm divine testimony by shewing that there is reason to believe it true. Reason has been too much employed where it has nothing to do, and too much neglected where it has most to do. Men have believed implicitly, when they should have reasoned, in laying the grounds of faith; and they have reasoned dogmatically, when they should have believed implicitly, these grounds being once laid.

A MAXIM has been established in theology, which may be brought to justify this proceeding against me; and the authority of St. AUSTIN may be brought to justify the maxim. But the authority of common sense, much better than that of St. AUSTIN, will justify me in saying that the maxim is false. The maxim is this, that miracles themselves are not to be admitted as proofs of a divine original, unless the cause, for which they are wrought, appears to us to be good; and therefore not till the doctrines they attest have been examined. By a parity of reason it may be said, that altho' the external evidence, which proves the scriptures of divine original, be full in that respect, yet the internal evidence must be sought for in them to make their authenticity complete in every respect. This maxim, and this way of reasoning were taken up perhaps very properly at a time when reports of miracles were easily believed, when every supposed magician was thought to perform them, and when they, who would not allow the pretensions of APOLLONIUS TYANAEUS, for instance, (who was opposed by the pagans to CHRIST, and who was worshipped as a god with CHRIST, ABRAHAM, and ORPHEUS, by the emperor SEVERUS) were obliged however to acknowledge his miracles. But the case is widely altered, and it is as improper to insist on this maxim now, as it might be proper then. We know now that miracles, real miracles, can be operated by no

power but that of God, nor for any purpose, by consequence, but such as infinite wisdom and truth direct and sanctify. We know therefore that no fact, nor doctrine, repugnant to the divine nature and attributes, can have been vouched by miracles, nor be taught in the word of God: and the difference is great between rejecting any such facts or doctrines, and the authority on which they are founded, as in the case of the Alcoran, for instance; and refusing to admit all the facts and doctrines contained in a book proved by undeniable testimony of the fact to be the word of God; till, besides this external proof, divines have furnished the internal proofs they boast of, which are often the wildest hypotheses of imagination, and such as a doctor of Mecca would hardly frame in behalf of the Alcoran. Vain triflers! they pretend to develop the whole secret of a divine oeconomy relative to man: and tho' it be so easy to discern what is evidently inconsistent with the divine attributes, that every reasonable man is able to discern it, yet these men are not stopped by such evidence. The presumptuous habits of theology carry them to talk of the plan, which they suppose infinite wisdom to have formed, as if they viewed it from an higher stage of intelligence and knowledge. From these whimsical paradoxes they derive the greatest part of what they call the internal evidence of the scriptures. On the whole, it is, I hope, plain by this time, that far from disbelieving the history of the Bible,

I assert



I assert the authority of it, and endeavour to place it out of the reach of cavil; whilst the divine does the contrary: for by taking the same liberty as he takes, and which every other man has the same right to take, some will pretend to find internal evidences of an human, where he pretends to find those of a divine, original: and thus the authenticity of the scriptures, instead of being once for all fixed, will be rendered by theological ostentation a matter of eternal dispute. But still I deny, that the example of the Israelites at and after the exode, under their judges, and under their kings, furnishes any argument against me. All the facts contained in the mosaical history are true. Be it so, at least for argument's sake: but consistently with them I may believe, nay, consistently with them I cannot believe otherwise, in opposition to Mr. LOCKE, and to all those who went before him in asserting what he asserts, that mankind could not be polytheists and idolaters from the beginning, no, nor near the beginning; and consequently that the belief and worship of the one true God could not be the national religion of the Israelites alone.

LET us consider now what will result from another hypothesis. We suppose then that men acquired, without any revelations general or particular, and by a due use of their reason, a knowledge of the one true God. That they might acquire it by these means, in former ages, can-

not be denied with any sort of modesty, or candor; since we are able to demonstrate invincibly this great truth by the same means: and if they might acquire it, on what pretence can it be said that they did not? Modern philosophy has opened a more glorious prospect of the works of God, than that which the ancient nations appear to us to have had; and every new discovery adds to the magnificence of the scene, and to the force of the argument. But the great author of nature was always visible in every part, even the most minute, of the system of nature: and they who were far from seeing as much of it as we see, tho' we too are far, very far surely, from seeing the whole, might easily observe an unity of design, which pointed out most evidently the unity of that Being by whose wisdom the design was laid, and by whose power it was executed. All I assume therefore is, that among creatures to whom God has given sense and intellect, there have been many at all times, who not only saw like the rest what was visible, but who discovered by reflection and contemplation what was intelligible, and yielded to the testimony God has given of himself. On this assumption we shall find reason to believe that genuine theism could be at no time confined to any one people, and that it must have been at different times, and in different places, discovered, established, corrupted, lost, and renewed, according to the vicissitude of human affairs.

WE represent the first communities of men roving about in herds, like some other animals, and such as we see many of the savage people of the world at this hour. As long as they continued in that state, the unity of God might be unknown to them, because, reason operating much more slowly, and especially in such a state, than the affections and passions of our nature, a multitude of superstitious notions, arising from ignorance and fear, could not fail to take possession of the minds of these men, and to prevent or misguide their reason. All the objects that surrounded them were new to them: and as they had not the experience of others to direct their judgment concerning the impressions which these objects made upon them, so their own experience came too late. The prejudices of superstition had rendered them inattentive to it, or unfit to make a reasonable use of it, before it came. But this could not continue, even on this hypothesis, to be long the universal state of mankind.

NATIONS were civilised, wise constitutions of government were framed, arts and sciences were invented and improved, long before the remotest time to which any history or tradition extends: and all this could not have been done without much more information of the moral and physical system of the world, and much greater efforts of human reason, than were necessary to demonstrate

strate the first principle of true theism. Let us conclude, therefore, on grounds of the highest probability, that God was known to such as made a due use of their reason, and demonstrated by them to others, even in nations unknown to us; and, since he was known, that he was worshipped: for to say he was known and not worshipped, is little less absurd than it would be to say he was worshipped and not known.

BUT tho' God was known and worshipped, it will not follow that this knowledge and worship were preserved, or even established, any where in all the purity of theism. Were they so among the Israelites, who retained so many of the rites, and ceremonies, and superstitious opinions of the lower Egypt, tho' they believed the unity of God, and abhorred idols, like the people of the upper? In short, are they so at this time? Are they so among us? It has been observed in the foregoing essay, and I have just touched the same thing in this, that, the seeds of superstitious opinions and practices having been sowed before nations were formed, or governments established, it is not unreasonable to believe that the first legislators cultivated them for political purposes: nay, even such as were neither polytheists, nor idolaters themselves (for it is very reasonable to suppose there were some such) might nurse up an abundant crop of superstition by the very means by which they designed to promote true religion. This we shall  
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not think improbable, if we consult history, or if we consider it analogically to the experience of our own' age. To work effects contrary to the intention of them, is a fate that attends very frequently the best of human expedients : and the reflection does no honor to our wisdom and foresight. Private ambition grew up naturally among those who intended nothing more by promoting religion, than the political purposes of government ; and the enthusiasm of superstition arose still more naturally among those who promoted it, because they believed in it. Both these motives contributed to corrupt genuine theism, to disguise first, and to conceal afterwards, the simplicity of natural religion under the tinsel and the embroidery of polytheism and idolatry. From both of them proceeded so many false pretences of revelation and inspiration, the legerdemain of miracles, and such blasphemous affectations of a divine nature, or mission, as the Indian Foe, or the Arabian MAHOMET, imposed on a great part of mankind.

THAT men are capable of falling from the knowledge of the one true God into polytheism, and from a pure worship of him into idolatry and superstition, by such means as I have mentioned, and by others, whether this knowledge and this worship were communicated to them by revelation, or discovered by the use of reason, as other truths are ; this very reason, as well as experience, will evince. But the difference between

tween the hypothesis, which assumes that the unity of the Supreme Being was taught by revelation alone, confirmed by miracles, and delivered down by tradition; and the hypothesis we go upon here, which assumes that this truth might be discovered by reason as well as by revelation at all times, and therefore must have been discovered at some times by those who had no other guide but reason, deserve to be considered a little more.

THE proposition which affirms that all the nations of the world, except the Israelites, were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, is, in many respects, to the last degree absurd. It implies that the Israelites were a nation from the beginning. But were they so, if we reckon from ADAM, or even from NOAH, or even from the vocation of their father ABRAHAM? If they were not so, why are they excepted as such from the beginning out of the assumed general ignorance of mankind concerning the true God? Some divines will tell us, that tho' God might be discovered, yet he could not be fully and certainly discovered, nor such as he is, by reason alone. That he was pleased, therefore, to discover himself by immediate revelation, not to the bulk of mankind, but to patriarchs, to prophets, and to his chosen people, both when they were a family, and when they were a nation. That he has revealed himself ever since in the same manner, and to the same persons, that is, to his elect, in the scriptures; which help them, says

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CALVIN in the sixth chapter of the first book of his Institution, like spectacles, to read distinctly and clearly what others discern confusedly and imperfectly. But they who compare the ideas and notions concerning the Supreme Being that reason collects from the phaenomena of nature, physical and moral, which we know to be the works of God, with those that the books of the Old Testament, which we suppose to be his word, give us, will be apt to lay these spectacles aside, and to conclude that the God of ABRAHAM, ISAAC, and JACOB cannot be that glorious supreme all-perfect Being whom reason shewed them, and whom they discerned with their naked eyes. But again: what do those words, “all the  
“the nations of the world,” signify? If we understand them literally, they affirm what it is impossible the affirmers should know to be true. If we understand by them, as we are apt to do, a few nations only, such as were formed on the first re-peopling of the world by NOAH, and his immediate descendants, they affirm what is still more improbable. In a word, this proposition stands in direct contradiction to the other, which is part of the same hypothesis; for if the knowledge of the true God was communicated by revelation, and propagated by the first men, who were witnesses of this revelation, according to the mosaical account, the true God must have been universally known in the beginning, and from the beginning. This needs no proof, it is self-evident; and they who will maintain that

that the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, with any consistency, must give up MOSES ; and instead of assuming such a revelation, and a tradition in consequence of it, they must admit that all men were ignorant of the true God, till some of them discovered this great truth by philosophical observation and meditation, and communicated it to others, as it is said that ABRAHAM did.

THEY may suppose, as much as they please, that the tradition was worn out, and the knowledge lost entirely, in less time than would have been sufficient to destroy the memory of the most trifling events and the least important opinions. Even this will not save their hypothesis. On the supposition of such a revelation, and of such a tradition, it would be still absurd to assert that all the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning ; as it would be hard, on the supposition that this knowledge was ever entirely lost among men, to account for the belief of one Supreme Being, which prevailed in the esoterical or secret doctrines of philosophers, whilst their exoterical or public doctrines were favorable to polytheism. All this, a general ignorance and a particular knowledge, can be accounted for no other way than by admitting, not only that the knowledge of one Supreme Being is to be acquired by reason, without the necessity of any revelation or  
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of any miracles to impose it, and that it has been so acquired in the improved, tho' not in the original state of mankind; but also that it may be, and has been established in general and national belief, at certain times, and under the influence of favorable conjunctures among several ancient nations. The authority of revelation, if God revealed himself to men in any other manner than by his works, being conveyed down by tradition, and this tradition being spent in a long tract of time, and by the various accidents which happen according to the course of human affairs, nothing would remain to keep up, or to renew, this belief in the minds of men. But the authority of reason ceasing to be exerted, or ceasing to prevail, reason would still remain, and be at hand to renew this belief, and propagate it again in a more happy season. Revelation descends like a torrent, and bears down all before it, whilst the tradition of it is fresh and strong. But this force diminishes gradually; the stream grows feeble, and ceases at last to run, by a necessity arising from the nature of things. The stream whereof reason is the source, may be obstructed in its course; it may creep scarce perceived in the same channels, for it may disappear entirely: but when it rolls no longer on the surface, it runs under ground, and is ever ready to break out anew.

Our physical and moral systems are carried round in one perpetual revolution, from generation  
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ration to corruption, and from corruption to generation; from ignorance to knowledge, and from knowledge to ignorance; from barbarity to civility, and from civility to barbarity. Arts and sciences grow up, flourish, decay, die, and return again under the same or other forms, after periods which appear long to us, however short they may be compared with the immense duration of the systems of created being. These periods are so disproportionate to all human means of preserving the memory of things, that when the same things return, we take frequently, for a new discovery, the revival of an art or science long before known. It is much the same with opinions, and even with many demonstrated principles of knowledge. The most absurd of the former come into public vogue, as well as the most evident of the latter; and the latter go out of it again, as well as the former. Let us descend into some particulars that may serve to illustrate what is here said.

WHEN we look into the history of the Greeks and Romans, how ignorant do these people appear to have been in the art of navigation? In what cockboats was the fate of the war decided at Salamis? What idea must we have even of the Carthaginian fleets, when we see them vanquished by a people whose skill had gone, till the first Punic war, little farther than hollowing trees into misshapen and unwieldy canoes \*? How

\* *Caudicariae naves.*

How was the progress of this art afterwards? Confined to the Mediterranean, and attempting little and seldom the Ocean, obliged in both to cling to the shore †, the stoutest of their ships of war would have foundered where a Deal yawl rides securely. Shall we conclude now from these representations, that they shew us the beginning of navigation? No. We see in them the decay of the art. To enquire critically into the voyages of BACCHUS, of HERCULES, of JASON; to fix the times when these heroes flourished, or when MINOS held the dominion of the sea, would be impertinent industry. It is enough to know, that tho' the Greeks were frightened at the flux and reflux of the sea, that new and astonishing phaenomenon to this knowing people even at the time of ALEXANDER's expedition, the Indian ocean, rough as it is, had been explored long before by merchants who sailed from the coast of Arabia and Egypt. If HERCULES erected his columns at the mouth of the Straights, the Phenicians passed beyond them. They visited the coasts of Portugal, the Fortunate islands, or the Canaries, and even the utmost Thule; perhaps the other hemisphere, and the islands at least, which COLUMBUS had the honor of discovering some thousands of years afterwards. The ships of MIDACRITUS, or MELCARTUS, traversed the bay of Biscay, and brought lead or tin "*ex Cassiteride insula*," probably from Cornwall. This we learn from ob-

\* *Legere et radere littus.*

scure tradition: and what do we see in the clearer light of history but the restoration of this very art? We have spoke of an art, let us speak now of a science.

ASTRONOMY had made a low figure among the Greeks for some time before HIPPARCHUS, who lived about the time of the sixth or seventh of the PTOLEMY'S: and tho' we hear much of the fame of THALES, of PYTHAGORAS, and EUDOXUS, yet astronomy and astrology, which we distinguish very properly, were in those days confounded together. Men were much more attentive to discover the imaginary influences of the stars, than to observe their real motions: and the honors done to BEROSUS by the Athenians, for his divine predictions, shew us in what manner, and to what purposes, this science was cultivated a little before HIPPARCHUS, that is, in the time of ALEXANDER. HIPPARCHUS invented mathematical instruments for observing the celestial phaenomena; and observed, it is said, very accurately. PTOLEMY, another astronomer, came after him; and tho' he made some pretensions to astrology, as others had done, yet he was an astronomer in the proper sense. He improved on the improvements of HIPPARCHUS, and the system which bears his name was universally received. It continued to be so till COPERNICUS arose. But if we conclude from hence, that we see the whole rise and progress of astronomy, or that COPERNICUS was the author

thor of a new system, we shall be much deceived. We see astronomy in it's decayed and corrupt state, and we see it recover from thence and return back to it's true principles. The beginnings of it among the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, if in truth it did begin among them, the progress they made, and the degree of perfection to which they carried it, are unknown to us. But besides several probable reasons, which determine us to think that they carried it very far, we know certainly that the true solar system, which COPERNICUS discovered about two hundred years ago, was taught in the Pythagorean schools above two thousand years ago, and was by consequence that of the schools of Egypt and Babylonia.

To speak now of opinions, and of the self-evident or demonstrated principles of real knowledge. The former fluctuate perpetually: when one of them alone can be true, a thousand that stand in direct opposition to one another are entertained. Whilst they last they are unsteady; time and experience explode them often: and when they return into use again, they are seldom exactly the same. The latter are fixed and uniform: time and experience confirm them, they cannot be exploded, they may be unknown, or they may be forgot; but whenever they are perceived by the mind, far from degenerating into opinions, they are perceived by every mind alike. Thus I think we are to understand that axiom of the Stoic *BALBUS*,

“ *Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturae judicia confirmat.*” It may be, it has been said, that the latter part of this axiom is often contradicted by experience, and that false demonstrations have taken often the place of true, as opinions merely probable, nay improbable, have passed among whole nations for the most demonstrated truths. But I suspect that this has been the case in appearance rather than in reality; or that the exceptions are too few to invalidate the general rule. Truths that may be called properly the judgments of nature, because they are conformable to the nature of things, and have been deduced from thence by a process of reasoning, in every step of which the mind has had intuitive knowledge, cannot be removed, they must be confirmed, by time; the nature of things and the reason of men continuing the same. But these very truths may be so disguised by opinions which are thought to be compatible with them, which muffle them up, and which cling to them, tho’ they be parts of them no more than clothes are parts of body, that the same principle of real knowledge, professed by different people, or at different times, appears to be a different principle. If *DIAGORAS*, or *THEODORUS*, or *VANINI*, or any other particular atheist, for a community of atheists never existed out of *Mr. BAYLE’s* head, had been asked, whether it is not the interest of every individual to submit to government, and to promote the good of society; or if any theist had  
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been asked, whether this be not the duty, as well as interest, of every individual; they would all have answered in the affirmative, and have assented to these first principles of public and private morality. Notwithstanding this, what a variety of opinions has there not been about this interest and this duty? They have been so various, as well as the practice of men consequent from them, that whoever considers his own, or past ages, may be tempted to think, that in some countries the obligation of submitting to government is esteemed unconditional, and illimited; and in others, no obligation at all; or that, as he sees no country wherein the common duties of society are enough observed, so there are others wherein every man deems himself an individual, independent by nature, and disavows any such duty. Suppose now that in one of these countries liberty be established on a system of law, equally distant from tyranny, and from licentiousness: suppose that in another such a reformation of manners be wrought, no matter by what means, that the duties of morality are practised in it universally, and with the utmost exactness: shall we conclude from these examples that in the former case the principles of public, and in the latter those of private, morality were never known, or had been lost, and were then demonstrated anew? Shall we not rather conclude, according to the truth of things, that these principles have been always known, and that the new establishment, and the new reformation,

do nothing more than strip them of the false opinions which were so complicated with them, that men derived their institutions and notions, not from the sure judgments of nature, but from the false comments of opinion \* ?

THUS again, the existence of one, supreme, self-existent and all-perfect Being, the first intelligent cause of all things, was acknowledged, as we discern more or less clearly by almost all our ancient traditions, in those nations who had any pretence to be esteemed civilised ; and most directly and explicitly in those that were the most enlightened by knowledge. But yet this bright and luminous truth, this judgment of nature, was clouded by such a multitude of superstitious notions, that it appeared dubiously : and that something, which seemed repugnant to it, might have been objected to every nation, who professed it in their outward, or even in their secret, doctrine. An orthodox Israelite was scandalised, no doubt, when he beheld among his heathen neighbours their deceased kings and heroes erected into divinities, and adored as such. But we may assure ourselves, that an inhabitant of Thebes in Egypt, who acknowledged no God but the unborn eternal KNEPH ; or even a poly-

\* N. B. There is a passage in POLYBIUS worth being turned to on this occasion. It is in the thirteenth book. He observes there how truth is disguised, or concealed by the false opinions of men ; but he insists, that these last for a time only, and that truth prevails always.



theist, who worshipping many gods, that is, inferior divinities, acknowledged still one Supreme Being, the monarch of gods and men ; was not less scandalised when he saw this Being, of whom he had the sublimest conceptions that the mind of man can frame, degraded into the rank of a local tutelary divinity, the God of ABRAHAM, of ISAAC, and of JACOB, the God of one family, and one nation, of a family who had strolled into Egypt for bread, of a nation who had been long slaves in that country. In vain would the learned priests of all sides have explained their symbolical rites and mystic doctrines. The Israelite would have remained convinced, that the one true God was unknown to the heathen ; and the heathen, that he was unknown to the Israelite. It fared with this principle of knowledge, as PLUTARCH observes in one of his miscellaneous tracts, in the manner that it fares with the virtues. The prudence of ULYSSES appeared different from that of NESTOR, and the justice of CATO from that of AGESILAUS. The same principle of knowledge, derived from the same use of reason, took various appearances from the various opinions that were complicated with it in the minds of men, much as the same virtue took a different hue according to the different tempers, characters, and circumstances of those who professed and practised it.

THIS seems to have been the state of things till the coming of CHRIST. Whether the know-

ledge and the worship of the one true God were taught by revelation, or by reason, that which is affirmed concerning them cannot be true. In the first case, they must have been known from the beginning by all the people of the earth, and long before the Israelites grew up to be a nation. In the second case, the man who should assert that ABRAHAM, or any other of the patriarchs, was alone able to make these discoveries by dint of reason, and philosophical reflection, would not deserve a serious answer. Nay further, if we go upon the first supposition, that of revelation, if we take the words of some divines, that this belief and worship could be communicated no other way to mankind, and that this sacred deposit was trusted to a people chosen to preserve it till the coming of the Messiah; this assumption will appear as little conformable to the reason of things, as several others are which the same men advance to be parts of the divine economy, and for which they appeal to the reason of mankind. Reason will pronounce, that no people was less fit than the Israelites to be chosen for this great trust on every account. They broke the trust continually; and the miracles, that were wrought to preserve it notwithstanding their apostasies, would have preserved it at least as well all over the world. Besides, the revelations made to them were “shut  
 “up in a little corner of the world, amongst a  
 “people by that very law, which they received  
 “with it, excluded from a commerce and com-  
 “munication

“munition with the rest of mankind,” as Mr. LOCKE \* observes very truly. A people so little known, and contemned, and thought vilely of by those nations that did know them, were therefore very “unfit and unable to propagate the doctrine of one God in the world.”

BUT wherefore, then, was this deposit made to them? It was of no use to other nations before the coming of CHRIST, nor served to prepare them for the reception of his gospel; and after his coming, it was in this great respect of little use, if of any, to the Jews themselves. They believed universally one God, but they were not universally disposed to believe in his Son. Monotheism might indispose them to the gospel, as well as their attachment to the law of MOSES. The expectation of the Messiah did not clash with monotheism; but they might imagine, that the belief of God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, did so very manifestly; the Trinity not having been early reconciled to the unity of God. Other nations seemed to be better prepared by philosophy, by that of PLATO in particular, and by the polytheistical notions of divine natures, some in the godhead, and some out of it, for the reception of the gospel, or of the theology which the preachers of the gospel taught. Accordingly we find, that when CHRIST came, and threw down the wall of partition, if

\* Reasonableness of Christianity.

he did throw it down, and not St. PAUL, the miracles wrought to propagate Christianity had greater effect out of Judea than in it. On the whole matter, it is impossible to conceive, on grounds of human reason, to what purpose a divine economy, relative to the coming of CHRIST, should have confined the knowledge of the true God to the Jews, and have left the rest of mankind without God in the world. On the other side, if men discovered the Creator of all things by their observations and their reasonings, things must have passed much as the memorials of ancient times give us grounds to believe that they did pass. The knowledge of the true God must have been uncertainly propagated, and uncertainly maintained; it must have been never lost, but always liable to be darkened by too much ignorance and stupidity in some, and too much imaginary knowledge, and the endless refinements of opinion in others.

THAT our Saviour found the whole world in a state of error concerning this first principle of natural religion, tho' not of absolute darkness, is allowed; and that the spreading of Christianity has contributed to destroy polytheism and idolatry is true. But that, which Mr. LOCKE advances to have been the consequence of this great event, is not true. It is not true, that God has been made known to the world by this revelation with such evidence and energy, that polytheism  
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and idolatry have been no where able to withstand it. On the contrary, orthodox theism has not prevailed in some countries where it has been taught. In others, Christianity has been established on the ruins of polytheism and idolatry, and has been rooted up again in its turn. Revelation has had no better success than reason. Neither has been able to preserve the purity of the doctrines they taught, nor an uniformity in the practice they prescribed. Nay, Mahometism, a religion instituted by an Arabian freebooter, who imposed himself for a prophet of God, and composed that extravagant rhapsody of superstition and enthusiasm, the Koran, has been further propagated than Christianity, and that not by the sword alone, no more than Christianity. MAHOMET and the first caliphs established their religion by the success and terror of their arms: but since that time it has been extended by spiritual conquests: and not only the conquered, but the conquerors, for such the Turks were, have embraced it. CHRIST, his apostles, and the first preachers of Christianity, established this religion by their miracles and by their sufferings. But since that time it has been propagated and preserved by violence as great at least, as that which the Saracens employed to establish the other. But however, and by what means soever, these religions have been extended, that of MAHOMET has taught the unity of God in terms so clear, and so precise,

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as to leave no room for any opinions that may be so much as strained into polytheism; and has so effectually banished all kinds of images, that the most gross and superstitious of the vulgar cannot have the least occasion of sliding into idolatry.

CHRIST found the world in darkness and error. But if he was to come again, would he not find it in the same state? Would he find even the religion he came to establish, either practised, or even taught, in its genuine purity? Would he not find the decalogue shortened, and the creed lengthened, by some Christians? Would he not find the creed shortened by others, who left the decalogue of the same size, even by Mr. LOCKE himself? Christianity has been, from the institution of it, in a perpetual flux, not relatively to certain opinions alone, that may be deemed indifferent, or not quite essential; but relatively to fundamental articles, on which the whole system leans. Let me produce one instance, which will illustrate, and confirm, what has been said against those, who take so much pains to make us believe, that polytheism and idolatry prevailed among the nations of the world from the beginning. Arianism had very nearly prevailed in the Christian church. It was all that intrigue could do to check, and all that wars and persecutions, wherein millions perished, could do to extirpate, this heresy. Let us suppose

pose now that these salutary methods had proved ineffectual, and that the orthodox faith was at this time creeping about in corners, as the Arian faith actually is, and was preserved only by a few rational and thinking men, who were fain, in their outward profession and worship, to go with the herd, and to keep to the religion established by law: I ask, would it be fair to conclude, that the orthodox faith had never been the faith of the Christian church, and that this abominable heresy had been established from the beginning? It would not be so, most certainly. To recapitulate, therefore, and to conclude: I think it plain, that the knowledge and worship of the one true God must have been the religion of mankind for a long time, if the mosaical history be authentic, and was not therefore confined from the beginning to the family of SEM, nor to the Israelites, who pretended to be of it. I think it plain, that the assumed confinement of this orthodox faith and worship could answer no imaginable design of a divine economy, preparatory to the coming of CHRIST; since the Jews, who had it, were not better prepared than the Gentiles, who are said not to have had it, to receive and embrace the gospel; and since this doctrine was propagated much more by heathen philosophers than by Jewish doctors. I think it plain, that, if we suppose the unity of God to have been discovered by reason, and to have been propagated by human authority merely, the  
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belief of it must have gone through all the vicissitudes, and have been exposed to all the corruptions, that appear to have attended it. I add, that we have the less reason to be surpris'd at this, or to doubt of it, since we see that very faith, which God himself came on earth to publish, which was confirmed by miracles, and recorded by divine inspiration, subject to the same vicissitudes and the same corruptions.



ESSAY THE FOURTH:

CONCERNING

AUTHORITY

IN MATTERS OF

RELIGION.



# E S S A Y

## T H E F O U R T H.

### S E C T I O N I.

**A**LL men are apt to have an high conceit of their own understandings, and to be tenacious of the opinions they profess: and yet almost all men are guided by the understandings of others, not by their own; and may be said more truly to adopt, than to beget, their opinions. Nurses, parents, pedagogues, and after them all, and above them all, that universal pedagogue custom, fill the mind with notions which it had no share in framing, which it receives as passively as it receives the impressions of outward objects, and which, left to itself, it would never have framed perhaps, or would have examined afterwards. Thus prejudices are established by education, and habits by custom. We are taught to think what others think, not how to think for ourselves: and whilst the memory is loaded, the understanding remains unexercised,

or exercised in such trammels as constrain its motions, and direct its pace, till that which was artificial becomes in some sort natural, and the mind can go no other.

WRONG notions, and false principles, begot in this manner by authority, may be called properly enough the bastards of the mind: and yet they are nursed and preserved by it as if they were the legitimate issue; nay, they are even deemed to be so by the mind itself. The mind grows fond of them accordingly: and this mistaken application of self-love makes men zealous to defend and propagate them by the same kind of authority, and by every other sort of imposition. Thus they are perpetuated: and as they contract the rust of antiquity, they grow to be more respected. The fact, that was delivered at first on very suspicious testimony, becomes indisputable; and the opinion, that was scarce problematical, becomes a demonstrated proposition. Nor is this at all wonderful. We look at original, through intermediate, authority; and it appears greater and better than it is really: just as objects of sight are sometimes magnified by an hazy medium. Men who would have been deemed ignorant, or mad, or knavish, if they had been our cotemporaries, are revered as prodigies of learning, of wisdom, and of virtue, because they lived many centuries ago. When their writings come down to posterity, posterity might judge indeed of their characters

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on better grounds than report and tradition : but the same authority, which shewed them in a half light, screens them in a full one. Paraphrases and commentaries accompany their writings. Their mistakes are excused, their contradictions are seemingly reconciled, their absurdities are varnished over, their puerilities are represented as marks of a most amiable simplicity, their enthusiastical rants as the language of the most sublime genius, or even of inspiration. And as this is frequently done with much skilful plausibility, so it is always aided by the strong prepossessions that have been created in their favor. The first traditional authorities that handed down phantastick science, and erroneous opinions, might be no better than the original authorities that imposed them. But they were sufficient for the time : and when error had once taken root deeply in the minds of men, tho' knowledge increased, and reason was better cultivated, yet they served principally to defend and embellish it. Truths, that have been discovered in the most enlightened ages and countries, have been by such means as these so blended with the errors of the darkest, that the whole mass of learning, which we boast of at this hour, must be separated, and sifted at great expence, like the ore of a poor mine ; and like that too, will hardly pay the costs.

It may sound oddly, but it is true in many cases to say, that if men had learned less, their

way to knowledge would be shorter and easier. It is indeed shorter and easier to proceed from ignorance to knowledge, than from error. They who are in the last, must unlearn before they can learn to any good purpose: and the first part of this double task is not in many respects the least difficult; for which reason it is seldom undertaken. The vulgar, under which denomination we must rank, on this occasion, almost all the sons of ADAM, content themselves to be guided by vulgar opinions. They know little, and believe much. They examine and judge for themselves in the common affairs of life sometimes; and not always even in these. But the greatest and the noblest objects of the human mind are very transiently, at best, the objects of theirs. On all these they resign themselves to the authority that prevails among the men with whom they live. Some of them want the means, all of them want the will, to do more: and as absurd as this may appear in speculation, it is best, perhaps, upon the whole, the human nature and the nature of government considered, that it should be as it is.

SCHOLARS and philosophers will demand to be excepted out of the vulgar, in this sense. But they have not a just claim to be so excepted. They profess to seek truth without any other regard; and yet the task of unlearning error is too hard for them. They set out in this search with the same prejudices and the same habits  
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that they who neglect it have; and they lean on authority in more cases than the others. If they improve and employ their reason more, it is only to degrade her the more; for they employ her always in subordination to another guide, and never trust themselves wholly to her conduct, even when authority cannot have the appearance of authority without her approbation. The task of unlearning error, and laying authority aside in the search of truth, is not only hard in itself, but it becomes harder still by two considerations, as it implies a self-denial of vanity, and of ambition. Scholars are ostentatious of their learning: and tho' he who has read much will not arrive at truth so soon, nor so surely, as he who has thought much, yet will he make a greater glare, and draw more admiration to himself. The man who accumulates authorities of philosophers, of fathers, and of councils, to establish an opinion that must be founded in reason, and be agreeable to the common sense of mankind, or be founded in nothing; is not unlike the child who chooses a crown in several pieces of brass, rather than a guinea in one piece of gold. Thus, again, we must not imagine that we behold an example of modesty and moderation when we see a whole sect of philosophers submit to the authority of one, as Pagans, Christians, and Mahometans, did in their turns, and for many ages, to that of ARISTOTLE; whilst they dared to reason in no other form, nor on any other principles than those which he had prescribed. It is in truth

an example of rank ambition. Such men, like the slaves who domineer in absolute monarchies, intend by their submission to a supreme tyrant to acquire the means of exercising tyranny in their turns.

THERE are innumerable cases in common life, and many in arts and sciences, wherein we must content ourselves, according to the condition of our nature, with probability, and rely on authority for want of the means, or opportunities of knowledge. I rely on the authority of my cook, when I eat my soup; on the authority of my apothecary, when I take a dose of rhubarb; on that of GRAHAM, when I buy my watch; and on that of Sir ISAAC NEWTON, when I believe in the doctrine of gravitation; because I am neither cook, apothecary, watchmaker, nor mathematician. But I am a rational creature, and am therefore obliged to judge for myself in all those cases where reason alone is the judge; the judge of the thing itself: for even in the others, reason is the judge of the authority. My parson might reproach me very justly with the folly of going through the journey of life without opening the eyes of my mind, and employing my intellectual sight. But my parson grows impertinent when he would persuade me, like those of your church, to remain in voluntary blindness; or, like those of ours, to let him see for me, tho' my eyes are open, tho' my faculties of vision are at least as good as his, and tho' I have all  
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the same objects of sight before my eyes that he has before his.

RESIGNATION to authority will appear the more absurd, if we consider, that by it we run two risks instead of one. We may deceive ourselves no doubt: but is the divine, is the philosopher, infallible? We shall not mean to deceive ourselves most certainly; but the divine, or the philosopher, may intend to deceive us: he may find his account in it, and deceit may be his trade. Had these men that superiority over others, which some of them have assumed; did the sublime objects of divine philosophy appear to them, tho' they do not appear so to us, in the effulgence of an immediate and direct light, there would be some better reason than there is for a dependence on their authority, at least in one respect. We might own their knowledge sufficient to establish this authority, whatever we thought of their candor and sincerity. But God has dealt more equally with his human creatures. There is no such superiority of some over others. They who exercise their reason, and improve their knowledge the most, are dazzled and blinded whenever they attempt to look beyond the reflected light wherein it is given us to contemplate the existence, the nature, the attributes, and the will, of God relatively to man. They who pretend to see, like so many intellectual eagles, the sun of eternal wisdom, and to see in that abyss of splendor, are so truly

metaphysical madmen, that he who attends to them, and relies on them, must be mad likewise.

THE more important any subject is, the more reason we have to be on our guard against the impositions and seductions of authority, and to judge in the best manner we can for ourselves. The all-wise God has disposed the universal order so, that every man is, by his nature, capable of acquiring a certain and sufficient knowledge of those things which are the most important to him; whilst he is left to probability and belief about others: and yet such are the contradictions which reconcile themselves to one another in the heads and hearts of men, that even they who perceive the importance of the subject, and are not delivered over by a supine neglect to authority, are however deterred by an unreasonable timidity from the use of their own judgments, and are determined by an affection of their minds, in opposition to common sense, to deliver themselves over to the prevalent authority, whatever that be. Thus they, who invade the reason of mankind triumph, not by their own strength, but by the prejudices of the invaded. Their success may be compared to that of a certain prince who placed, it is said, cats and other animals, adored by the Egyptians, in the front of his army when he invaded that people. A reverence for these phantoms made the Egyptians lay down their arms, and become an easy conquest.

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THIS timidity is the less excusable, because the divine wisdom, as I hinted above, has been pleased to manifest to us a rule of inquiry and judgment in matters of divine philosophy and natural religion, that is sure as far as it goes: and it goes most certainly as far as the same wisdom intended that our inquiries and judgments should proceed. It serves at once both to direct and limit them. God has shewn these great objects to us in a light reflected from his works, and proportioned to our nature. He has shewn them in no other, in the ordinary course of his providence. The way therefore to avoid phantastical, and to attain some degree of real, knowledge concerning them is to apply ourselves to a careful observation of the phaenomena of nature, corporeal and intellectual, as nature is commonly distinguished. The true foundations of natural theology must be laid in natural philosophy. So they have been laid in part at least, by ancient and modern theists, and by the latter especially, since the wonderful discoveries that have been made by the improvement of experimental philosophy; discoveries, that might send the wisest men of antiquity, sacred and prophane, could they arise from the dead with all their wisdom and all their learning about them, once more to school.

THE foundations \* of theism have been laid  
wider,

\* THIS note was added a great number of years after I had written what is contained in the text referred to, and  
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wider, but they wanted no solidity before these discoveries. These new proofs, nay all proofs  
beyond

after my opinions concerning the Supreme Being, and the proofs of his existence, had been established in my mind ; because I have lately found, in the History of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Berlin for the year 1746, a dissertation written by a very ingenious man, a very good philosopher, and one with whom I have been long acquainted, that I cannot approve on many accounts. His avowed design is to deduce the proofs of God's existence from the general, not any particular, laws of nature, and to deduce those of motion and rest metaphysically from the attributes of the Supreme Intelligence.

To make way for this proof he rejects, or endeavours to weaken, every other proof, on this pretence, that the attempt to establish truth on false reasonings is the greatest injury which can be done to it. I shall not take on me to examine his hypothesis, how little soever I like the deduction of a physical hypothesis from metaphysical principles, instead of establishing general, abstract, or, if you please, metaphysical axioms on particular experiments and observation.

MR. MAUPERTUIS lays no weight on the famous argument of DES CARTES taken from the idea of an infinite, all-perfect Being, which he supposes to be in the human mind : and MAUPERTUIS is in the right. He says little on the assumed universal consent of mankind to this great and fundamental truth : and he is not in the wrong. This consent is not such as it stands represented by many. It is general enough to shew the proportion which this truth bears to the universal reason of mankind : and I think it would prove no more if it was still more general. The actual existence of such a Being cannot be fairly deduced  
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beyond those which every observing man is able to draw even from an unphilosophical view of  
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from it. He will not insist, he says, on the argument which may be drawn from the intelligence whereof we are conscious, to a first intelligence, infinite, and eternal, which is the original of all intelligence, and the first cause of all things: and yet I apprehend that he has given us none so good, by the help of metaphysics and mathematics, as this, which is plain and obvious to the conception of every rational creature.

THAT some theists have reasoned weakly from the phaenomena of nature to the existence of God is, I believe, true; as I am sure it is true that others would have made the doctrine of final causes ridiculous, if any thing could make it so, by the ridiculous application of it on every unworthy and trifling occasion. But we must not learn from hence to despise all those arguments which ancient philosophers drew from the beauty, order, and disposition of the universe, on this smart conceit, that they knew too little of nature to have a right to admire it.

He is not satisfied neither with those which NEWTON, and much less with those which other naturalists have drawn from the same phaenomena. If he cites those of NEWTON, it is only to shew how weak and inconclusive even these are. NEWTON thought that the uniform motion of the planets proved itself necessarily to have been directed by choice, not by chance; and he shews the great probability of this doctrine. But then he thinks there remains probability enough on the other side, to hinder us from saying that this uniformity must have been necessarily the effect of choice; tho' it should be granted, agreeably to NEWTON's system, that all the celestial bodies, being  
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the system of nature, are proofs *ex abundantia*. I honor most sincerely those philosophers who have

drawn towards the sun, move in a vacuum. On the other hand he advances, that the force of NEWTON's argument being founded alone on the impossibility of assigning a physical cause of this uniformity in his hypothesis, it will have no force with other philosophers. The uniformity of these motions will not appear inexplicable to those who admit a fluid matter, in which the planets are hurried round, or by which their motion is moderated. On this foot we are not reduced to the alternative of supposing either chance, or choice: and such an uniformity of motion will prove the existence of God no more than any other motion impressed on matter. This MAUPERTUIS says. But till the physical cause of the uniform motion of the planets has been explained intelligibly by the hypothesis of a fluid, we must remain where we were, and have recourse in one case, as well as in the other, to choice, or chance.

THIS philosopher thinks that the argument, drawn by NEWTON from the formation of animals, has no more strength than the former. He asks, whether, if the uniformity of some be a proof on one side, the infinite variety of others will not be a proof on the other side? Now surely these proofs are so far from being contradictory, that they coincide. The eagle, the fly, the stag, the snail, the whale, and the oyster, are very different animals, no doubt; and the immense variety of the different species of animals appropriated to different elements and purposes, displays the magnificence of the animal world, and the infinite power of its author; as the uniformity of all those of the same species shews the design and wisdom of that Being who created them, and appropriated them

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have endeavoured to raise the thoughts of men,  
by these discoveries, from the phaenomena up  
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to the same elements, and to the same purposes. When we compare an eagle to a fly, we find a proof of one. When we compare an eagle to an eagle, we find a proof of the other. In short, the objection is founded in cavil, not in argument.

MR. MAUPERTUIS proceeds, and admits, but admits as if it were for argument's sake alone, that the proportion of the different parts and organs of animals to their wants carries a more solid appearance; and he judges that they reason very ill, who assert that the uses, to which these parts and organs are applied, were not the final causes of them, but that they are so applied because the animal is so made. Chance gave eyes and ears; and since we have them, we make use of them to see and hear. He thinks however it may be said, that, chance having produced an immense number of individuals, those of them, whose parts and organs were proportioned to their wants, have subsisted, whilst those who wanted this proportion have perished and disappeared. Those who had no mouth, for instance, could not eat, and live; those who wanted the organs of generation could not perpetuate their species: and thus from the present state of things theists draw an argument, which will appear fallacious when it is applied to the possible original of things.

To ridicule the proofs of this kind, he asks, a little too triumphantly, what it signifies to discover appearances of order and proportion, if after this discovery we are stopped in our reasoning by some untoward conclusion? He instances in the serpent, who can neither walk, nor fly, and yet saves himself from the pursuit of other animals  
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to the author of nature, instead of amusing the  
world, like many others, with metaphysical ab-  
stractions.

by the flexibility of his body, which enables him to crawl  
away faster than many of them can follow him. The  
cold of the winter would chill him to death, if the form  
of his body, and the slippery smoothness of his skin, did  
not enable him likewise to creep through holes that hide him  
under the ground. This is the discovery. The untoward  
conclusion follows; and he asks, to what purpose does all  
this serve? Why truly to none but the preservation of an  
animal, whose bite is sufficient to kill a man. Thus the  
philosopher endeavours to destroy one proof of God's ex-  
istence, by begging the same question as the divine begs,  
when he would prove that God is unjust, because there  
is either physical or moral evil in the world; that is,  
by assuming man to be the final cause of the creation.

THE great and respectable persons, such as father  
MALBRANCHE, whose authority MAUPERTUIS cites against  
the order observed in the construction of the universe,  
and who were at a loss to comprehend how it could be the  
work of a Being infinitely wise and powerful, built their  
objections on the same assumption; and ran, as he observes,  
into many absurd systems. But I wave entering any farther  
here into the consideration of this assumption, and the use  
that is made of it, since I have taken occasion to speak fully  
about it in another place.

THE criticism he makes on that expression which closes  
the first of Mr. POPE's ethic epistles, "whatever is, is  
right," cannot be maintained. The proposition is not ad-  
vanced as an argument to prove the existence of God,  
nor as a profession of faith, "un acte de foi." I pre-  
sume Mr. POPE meant it as a reasonable consequence of  
what



fractions. But yet I think, that we wanted neither a BOYLE, nor a RAY, nor a DERHAM,  
nor

what he supposed already proved; and that when design and wisdom were so evidently marked in all the works of God which are objects of human observation and knowledge, it became his creatures to conclude that the same wisdom and design were employed in the whole, tho' human observation and knowledge cannot reach to the whole; and therefore that he was justified, as he was most certainly, in pronouncing that "whatever is, is right." To say that this axiom tends to submit all things to a fatal necessity, is not true. To say that it establishes submission and resignation to the divine providence, in opposition to the pride and presumption of philosophers and divines, is true. It is a truth which no man should be ashamed to own, and which every rational creature should be ashamed to contradict.

MAUPERTUIS himself admits enough to establish this truth, when he admits that intelligence and design are perceivable in a multitude of the phaenomena; and yet he does not give up the point. It is not enough, he says, to prove intelligence and design. To prove the wisdom of God, we must penetrate into the objects to which this intelligence and design were directed. Ability in the execution is insufficient. To shew his wisdom, we must prove his motives to have been reasonable. To what purpose do we admire that regularity with which all the planets move the same way, almost in the same plane, and in orbits nearly alike, if we do not see that it is better that they should move so, than otherwise; that is, if we have not discovered the sufficient reason that LEIBNITZ requires in all cases where things may be done more ways than one? A reasonable man may content himself, without this

nor a NEWYNTIT, to convince us of the self-existence of an intelligent Being, the first cause of all things: and I am sure that we are much to blame if we want a BENTLEY, or a CLARKE, to put us in mind, for in truth they do no more, of the existence of such a Being. In short, natural theology rests on better foundations than authority of any kind: and the duties of natural religion, and the sins against it, are held out to us by the constitution of our nature, and by daily experience, in characters so visible, that he who runs may read them.

THESE revelations, for such they may be properly called, are made to the reason of mankind: and the same reason, that collects them from the face of nature, is able to propagate the knowledge of them, and to find means of enforcing, as far as the general imperfection of our nature, and particular contingent circumstances admit, a conduct suitable to them. But

this sufficient reason, in many cases; and LEIBNITZ blundered grievously when he pretended to have found it in some. I doubt MAUPERTUIS has not succeeded better in deducing the first and universal laws of nature from the attributes of an all-wise and all-powerful Being, in order to shew, that since these laws, which are observed in the universe, are the very same which such attributes must have produced, such a Being must exist, and be the author of these laws. Happily we have no want of this demonstration.

men have not been contented to do this. They have imagined, or they have found in the frailty of the human nature, and the imperfection of the human state, an apparent necessity of going farther; of adding art to nature, falsehood to truth, and their own inventions for divine communications. In order to make the imposition pass, they have set authority in the place of reason. The religion of nature, and therefore of the God of nature, is simple and plain; it tells us nothing which our reason is unable to comprehend, and much less any thing which is repugnant to it. Natural religion and reason are always agreed, they are always the same, and the whole economy of God's dispensations to man is of a piece. But religions, founded in the pretended revelations we speak of here, grow voluminous and mysterious, oppose belief to knowledge, and, when they cannot stand a reasonable examination, escape from reason by assuming that they are above it. Many such religions have appeared in the world. We Christians reject them all, not only because they carry most evident marks of imposture, but because there can be no more than one true revelation, and that is undoubtedly the revelation we acknowledge: for choosing of which however, and for rejecting the others, we must confess that we had no reason at all, or we must confess that the truth of a revelation is an object of reason, and to be tried by it.

RELIGIONS, instituted by men who thought themselves inspired when they were only mad, or by men who were thought to be inspired when they were only cheats, rest on the mere authority of their founder, maintained and improved by his disciples, and their successors. Reason had no share in examining the original pretended revelation, nor has much in examining the descent of the tradition that preserves it. How could reason have any share in examining and controlling the first, on which the last, and all the consequences of an imposture, depend, among men ignorant and credulous, or who were prepared by superstition to believe revelation no uncommon event? The enthusiast was not enough in his senses to reflect, that, in order to be assured he had a revelation from God, it was necessary he should have not only a lively inward sentiment of the divine truth that he supposed revealed to him, but also a clear and distinct perception of the time and manner in which this supernatural operation was performed. The impostor was enough in his senses to know, that no one was able to prove he had not the revelations he pretended to have; because no man is able any more to perceive the perceptions of another man's mind, however occasioned, than to see an outward object by the eyes, or to hear a sound by the ears, of another. Believers in men of both these characters were never wanting; and far from examining, it became a merit not to examine.

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“HE said it,” was foundation enough for an article of faith in the Pythagorean religion : and the same proof was sufficient to establish the religion of FOE, that began in India, was propagated into China, and spread in several sects all over the east. The same observation may be made on other religions that have been imposed by the force of authority, no matter how acquired, on ignorant and superstitious people at first, and on those of more sense and knowledge when the authority was grown too strong to be shaken. But Christianity was not so imposed ; and nothing can be more plain than this, that God submitted the authority of his revelation, at the time he gave it, and therefore at every later time much more, to the reason of the creatures to whom he gave it.

WHEN we consider the great and glorious purposes of this revelation, the manner in which, and the person, even the son of God himself, by whom it was made ; and all the stupendous miracles in the heavens, and on earth, that were wrought to confirm it ; we are ready to conclude that such a revelation must have left reason nothing to do, must have forced conviction, and have taken away even the possibility of doubt. This consequence seems so necessary, that if such events were stated hypothetically, the hypothesis would be rejected as defective and inconsistent, unless they were supposed to have had their full effect :

and yet in fact, an universal submission of all those, who were witnesses of the signs and wonders that accompanied the publication of the gospel, did not follow. The learned men among the Jews, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the rulers of the people, were persecutors of Christianity, not converts to it : and the vulgar, as well as they, were so far from believing JESUS to be the Messiah their nation expected, or any divine person sent by God, that when PILATE inclined to save him, instead of BARABBAS, a notorious criminal, the whole crowd cried out, “ Let his blood be on us and our children ;” and insisted, with a sort of mutinous zeal, on his execution.

WHAT are we to say now ? The Jew will insist that the miracles might be such as they are reported to have been : but that if they were such, they were wrought by the powers of magic, like those of APOLLONIUS of Tyana ; or by some secret charm, like that of the true pronunciation of the name that consisted of four letters, the famous tetragrammaton ; and that his ancestors had reason therefore to reject the proofs drawn from them, instead of believing that the God of truth had set his seal, as it were, to an imposture. the infidel will insist, that all these miracles were equivocal at best, such as credulous superstitious persons, and none else, believed, such as were frequently and universally imposed by the first fathers of the Christian church, and

as are so still by their successors, wherever ignorance of superstition abound. He will apply to miracles what BESSARION said of saints, and bid us judge of the ancient by the modern. Thus will these men account for the little success which the gospel had on the first publication of it: little, I mean, when compared with the authority of the preacher, whose divinity was sufficiently manifested under the disguise of humanity.

## S E C T. II.

**B**UT I ask, what now will a good and reasonable Christian say? He will not alledge, I think, that the Jews were rejected, and the Gentiles called in: since his two antagonists would be ready to answer, that he set the effect in the place of the cause, and the cause of the effect, when he assumed that the Jews refused to believe in the miracles and gospel of CHRIST because they were rejected, instead of assuming that they were rejected because of their unbelief. Would he follow the example that has been set on other occasions? Would he reason from his notions, well or ill abstracted, of order, and of the fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, to the conduct of God, call this reasoning demonstration, and when he found the phaenomena stand in opposition to it (as they would do evidently in the present case, since that universality of submission to the Son of God was not paid, which ought to

have been paid according to all our ideas of order and fitness) would he have recourse to some bungling hypothesis to reconcile them? If he took this method, it would happen to him as it has happened to divines very often; he would strengthen the objection of the infidel, and not be able to solve it afterwards.

AN end, to which the means are not proportioned, can never be the end of infinite wisdom, seconded by infinite power. The means employed to establish and maintain the gospel have not been sufficient to do it independently of reason, and by the mere force of authority, from the first publication of it. The end and design therefore of infinite wisdom was not to subject human reason, how much soever it was in fact subjected by the first converts, to a revelation received implicitly, even on the authority of the Son of God himself, and much less on any other. Reason was made so necessary to judge of this revelation, even at the time it was given, that if we suppose ourselves transported back to that time, and inquiring into the truth of this revelation on the very spot where it was made, we shall find that, far from being determined by authority in favor of it, our reason would have had much to do in comparing the various and contradictory testimonies, and in balancing the degrees of probability that resulted from them. The contest between the first witnesses of Christian revelation, and the rest of the Jews who witnessed  
against



against it, became a party contest, carried on with great zeal on the persecuted side, and great cruelty on the other. They disputed not only about the miracles that had been wrought, and were daily working among them, even about that decisive concluding miracle the resurrection of Jesus; but about the interpretation of their prophecies, which foretold the coming of the Messiah, and about the application of them to him. In such a confused state of things, on whose authority could any honest inquirer have depended? If he had weighed, or if he had counted suffrages, he would have been equally determined against the truth; and upon the whole he must have despaired of coming to a determination at all by any other way, than that of employing the utmost sagacity of his mind, and judging for himself, unless it had pleased God to make him some particular revelation.

THIS advantage St. PAUL boasted that he had. The miracles of CHRIST and of his disciples made so little impression on him, tho' he had not only heard of them all, but had been an eye-witness, at least, of that which appeared when St. STEPHEN was stoned to death, that he signalised his zeal against Christianity till he himself became the subject of a most miraculous operation, and was called upon by JESUS in a short, but very pathetic exhortation\*. In this manner he was converted; and in this manner

\* Acts of the Apostles, chap. ix.

every inhabitant of the earth, Jew or Gentile, learned or ignorant, might have been converted as well as he. But it was not in the plan of providence to employ the immediate, particular, miraculous, and therefore irresistible authority of revelation in many cases: and all other authority, even that of miracles, occasionally wrought before some, and reported by others, being inadequate to universal conviction, the generality of men were left to embrace Christianity or not, as their reason, right or wrong, weak or strong, should direct; and reason not being subdued by revelation, revelation was subjected to reason. St. PAUL was not in this case; his reason had been subdued effectually: but he dealt with other men as being in it. He argued, he expostulated, he appealed to their reason principally. He worked indeed now and then a miracle, as it was given him to work them; for his case in this respect may be compared to that, which a divine of the faculty of Paris, whom I have quoted elsewhere, assumed to be the case of all those who wrote the books of the Old testament. One seemed to have had inspirations, and the others a power of working miracles occasionally, not constantly. PAUL, therefore, appealed chiefly to the reason of mankind in his several missions. On two of these missions, at least, it may be to our present purpose to make some reflections.

He preached at Antioch to the Jews and to  
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the Gentiles : the former contradicted him, disputed with him, and raised a persecution against him and his companion BARNABAS. The apostles worked no miracles on this occasion, like men who knew how ineffectual the authority they procured was, for the most part, in the then ordinary exercise of that power. The last recourse was to reason ; and when that failed, the apostles turned themselves from the lost sheep of the house of Israel to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were more docile, and free from the prejudices of the Jews about their prophecies, which only served to mislead them : reason had more effect on these ; they rejoiced, they glorified the word of God, and they believed, that is, as many of them as were preordained to eternal life ; for it would seem by this passage, that neither authority, nor reason, nor miracles, nor all these together were sufficient to make men proselytes to Christianity without a previous designation, and divine election†. Let us follow

\* Crediderunt quotquot erant praeordinati ad vitam aeternam. Act. c. xiii.

† N. B. The opinion that God acts with men by arbitrary will, and by virtue of his absolute sovereignty over his creatures, being once established, and, in consequence of it, the doctrines of election, reprobation, and an eternal predestination ; much of what has been said falls to the ground. Miracles were as superfluous as reason, where special grace was to operate ; and both insignificant, where it was not to operate. I own myself unable to reconcile these apparent inconsistencies, and I leave that task to others.

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St. PAUL from Antioch to Rome, where he succeeded a little better among the Jews. Those of Asia looked upon him as an apostate, and were the more averse to Christianity, perhaps, for his preaching it. But the Jews at Rome had no prejudices against him, tho' he was brought thither in chains. They had received no letters about him from Judaea; no one who came from thence had spoke any evil of him. They had heard indeed of a new sect, which was every where opposed, and they were desirous to know his opinion of it \*. They took a day to hear him, and they heard him with remarkable patience, for they heard him from morning to night. He was full of the Holy Ghost, he argued from the law of MOSES, from the prophets, and from every other topic, as we may assure ourselves, and omitted nothing that might persuade them to embrace the gospel. What was the effect? Some believed, and some believed not. The same may be observed of his proceeding at Thessalonica. He went into the synagogue, he worked no miracles, but he reasoned with the Jews three sabbath days, &c.

To conclude on this head then: it is plain that the first publishers of Christianity did not rest the cause primarily, or solely, on authority of any kind. It is plain that they submitted the gospel, and the authority of those who published it, to the examination of reason, as any other

\* Acts, ch. xxviii.

system even of divine philosophy ought to be submitted. The consequence was, that it prevailed as other religions have done, and not with that universal assent which might have been expected from a religion given by God himself, and given to all the sons of men; from a revelation, their belief in which was to decide their eternal happiness or misery, and which omnipotence could have imposed as easily on all as on some, if infinite wisdom had so designed. Right reason is always on the side of truth: it is truth, and can never differ from itself. But right and wrong reason, the bona and mala ratio of COTTA, being nothing else than the result of a right and wrong use of our faculties, it is no wonder, the imperfection of these faculties, and the prejudices and seductions to which we are exposed, being considered, that the wrong takes often the place of the right, and passes for it. Why the natural order of things was preserved thus far in the case of a supernatural dispensation, why so many particular miracles were wrought ineffectually to the general avowed design of this revelation, and why the divine authority of it was not manifested to all concerned in it, that is, to all mankind, as the divine authority of the law was manifested to all concerned in it, that is, to all the Israelites. let us not presume to guess. In this manner Christianity was first promulgated; and in this manner, therefore, it was right and fit that Christianity should be promulgated.

BUT now, since the prerogative of reason was thus established over revelation originally, it is proper we should inquire how far this prerogative extends now, and whether it be lessened, or increased, by length of time. In order to this divines teach, that we must distinguish between the external and internal evidences of the truth and divinity of the Christian revelation: by which I mean the testimony brought to prove the fact, that this revelation was made by God; and the character of the doctrines contained in it, whether worthy or unworthy of a divine original. If they can establish the fact sufficiently, the second attempt seems little necessary: but it is for the honor of Christianity to stand such examinations as every pretended revelation declines; and our divines themselves exhort us so to examine; tho' it must be confessed that, when the result of our examination is not strictly conformable to the doctrines they teach, they damn us for examining; according to that absurd prerogative which they exercise frequently of advancing general propositions, and of condemning them in particular instances. Let us not be so absurd. He who examines in a manner to shew, that, whilst he refuses submission to the authority of man as if it was that of God, he is careful not to reject the authority of God as if it were that of man, does much more service to Christianity, than he who resolves all into authority, and builds his religion on his faith, instead of building his faith on his religion; that is, than he who assents to facts

facts and doctrines, and a whole system of religion implicitly, without an examination of any part of it, instead of believing things that he can neither comprehend, nor examine, on the foundation of those which he comprehends, and has examined.

OF the two sorts of evidence that have been mentioned, the external comes first under examination; for nothing can be more ridiculous than that which has happened very often to philosophers and learned men, to examine the causes of things, to descant profoundly on their nature, and after that to find that the existence of these things was doubtful, or the non-existence certain. One of your divines would urge the authority of the church on this occasion, as sufficient to supply the want of any other proof, and to fill up the measure of probability, which he would call certainty. But he would urge it most absurdly, since he would prove in a circle the authority of the church by that of the scriptures, and the authority of the scriptures by that of the church. One of our protestant divines, who unite in opposition to the authority of your church, and would be glad to erect an authority very like to it each in his own, would mince the matter a little, would rather insinuate, than assert, such an authority, and rather persuade, than demand, submission to it. He would allow that, in the full latitude of evangelical liberty, you have a right to examine the testimony in  
favor

favor of Christianity: but he would attempt at the same time to shew you, that it is much more easy, and full as safe, to rely on the authority of so many pious, judicious, and learned men, as have made it the business of their lives to examine the testimonies of this revelation, and have agreed to affirm the validity of them.

NEITHER of these divines however would be so ridiculous, I think, as to deny that the external evidence of Christian revelation has been diminished by time. They would own, that it has been so by the loss of many proofs, whereof time and accidents have deprived us. But I am apt to suspect that, if time and accidents had been more impartial, and had conveyed down to us all the proofs that were brought for it and against it, tho' proofs would have been more abundant, the evidence would not have been greater, and we should be puzzled as much by contradictory, as we are by scanty, proofs. We have indeed the concurrent testimony of the sacred writers: and it has been asked, whether we have not as much knowledge of them as we have of several profane writers whose histories pass for authentic? It has been said too by some of those who corrupt, oftener than they correct, the text of ancient authors, that it is by a multitude of various readings, and of critical emendations, that these authors have been restored. But the comparisons are by no means just: for a different proof is necessary of the competency of



of authors, and a different assurance of the sense of their writings, according to the different use that is made of the authority. We know that the memorials of men who had been captains in the army of ALEXANDER, and eye-witnesses of all that passed in his famous expedition, were in some instances different and contradictory. We have reason to suspect the veracity of CAESAR in some parts of his commentaries; and if we had the commentaries of LABIENUS, or those of ASINIUS POLLIO, as we have the history of DION CASSIUS, we should have still more reason to suspect, or we should find more proofs, perhaps, of the errors. We read, however, the histories of ARRIAN, and even of QUINTUS CURTIUS, tho' we do not know who the latter was, and the commentaries of CAESAR, as authentic histories. Such they are too, for all our purposes; and if passages which we deem genuine should be spurious, if others should be corrupted, or interpolated, and if the authors should have purposely, or through deception, disguised the truth, or advanced untruth, no great hurt would be done. But is this the case of the scriptures? In them, besides all the other circumstances necessary to constitute historical probability, it is not enough that the tenor of facts and doctrines be true; the least error is of consequence. There was a time when the eastern and western churches had great disputes about the procession of the Holy Ghost; whether he proceeded from the Father and the Son, or from

from the Father by the Son. These disputes occasioned much disorder, tho' the difference of a monosyllable was alone concerned. But other disputes had arisen before these, lasted longer, and devastated almost all Christendom by wars, persecutions, and massacres, tho' the sole difference between the contending parties was about a single letter. One side affirmed, and the Nicæan council decreed, that the son was *ὁμοούσιος*, that is, consubstantial with the Father, "habens simul essentiam, id est, eandem essentiam;" the Arians, most of them at least, would have acknowledged him to be *ὁμοιούσιος*, that is, of similar substance, "habens similem essentiam;" but the holy council adhered, and the Arians were all damned for the difference of an iota. If the decrees of councils, therefore, and the several creeds that were made required so exact a precision of words and letters, and if the least mistake was of such fatal consequence, what must we think, what have we not reason to fear, concerning that text on which they have all pretended to be founded, and wherein it is said, that there are thirty thousand various readings? When we meet with any record cited in history, we accept the historical proof, and content ourselves with it, of how many copies soever it may be the copy. But this proof would not be admitted in judicature, as Mr. LOCKE \* observes, nor any thing less than an attested copy of the record. The application is obvious:

\* Essay, lib. iv. c. 16.

and

and if it be reasonable to take such a precaution in matters that concern private property, and wherein the sum of ten pounds may not be at stake, how much more reasonable is it to neglect no precaution, that can be taken, to assure ourselves that we receive nothing for the word of God, which is not sufficiently attested to be so? It may be said, it has been said by a very able writer, that “the ground of this proceeding in civil courts seems to be, that the original record, or an attested copy, is capable of being produced; and that therefore to offer any distant proof might look as if some art were intended to corrupt matters, and to disguise the truth.” After this he asks, “is it in the nature of things as possible and easy to produce the originals or attested copies of the scriptures—as it is to do so in matters which come before a civil court?” The evasion is not even plausible. The copy of a copy is not refused in proof, solely because the original or attested copy may be had; for this is not always the case: but because the proof would be too distant, whether they can be had or no. The two cases therefore are not vastly, as this writer affirms, nor at all, different. If the rule may be thought reasonable in the one, it cannot be thought without absurdity, unreasonable in the other. However it happens, the want of an original, or of an attested, copy is a want of proof: and the learned divine will be forced, if he is pushed on this article, to confess this want of proof,

or to supply it, which he is too wise to attempt, by shewing that the scriptures we have are attested copies of the originals. I might carry this very far, if I would carry it as far as occasion is given to carry it. But I will only say, that it would be much better to leave objections unanswered, than to answer them no better ; and that I pity a man of as good parts as Dr. CONY-BEARE, who is obliged to such drudgery. The authenticity of the scriptures has suffered much diminution by length of time, and by other ways : for which reason divines would do better perhaps, if they trusted more to grace and faith to supply this diminution, and less to their own skill in the establishment of the external proofs of a traditional revelation : tho' I know that these external proofs may be deemed to be in some sort conditiones, sine quibus non.

### S E C T. III.

**B**UT the prerogative of reason extends farther than the examination of witnesses, and other external testimony. There is another ground of probability to be established ; and if this cannot be established, the credit of a revelation will not support itself on the other alone. This ground of probability is that which was mentioned at the same time with the former, and is called internal evidence. Divines found it high, and build much upon it ; but their proceeding is, to my apprehension, alike absurd and licentious.

A DIVINE,

A DIVINE, who has a large stock of theological presumption, finds direct and evident proofs of a divine inspiration in the very style of the scriptures; in the sublimity of some parts, and in the simplicity of others; tho' the same sublimity, and the same simplicity, are to be found in uncanonical writings, and even in those of eastern nations that are not Christian. He reasons magisterially, as if he was thoroughly acquainted not only with the human, but with the divine, nature; as if his understanding bore so near a proportion to the wisdom of God, that he could discover it latent in the deepest mysteries; or under the veil of things seemingly so indifferent, or so common, that men of less sagacity would not suspect even human wisdom to have been employed about them; and finally, as if his extended genius was able to comprehend a whole economy of divine wisdom from ADAM down to CHRIST, nay even to the consummation of things; to connect all the dispensations, and to shew the sufficient reason of providence in every particular instance on the same plan. This now is madness, or something worse than madness: and yet men are so accustomed to reason in this method, and on these principles, that not only the learned and ingenious, who have some pretence to be so mad, pursue them; but every dabbler in theology, who has no such pretence, and must pass for a fool or a knave whenever he grows extra-

vagant, affects to reason in the same manner when he writes, or when he preaches, and talks as impertinently in the pulpit of the designs of God, and of the conduct of providence, as he talks of the political designs and conduct of his governors in the coffee-house. Thus the bible becomes a canvas, on which it has been the business of many to dawb, from the time when it was first spread before them. If it was agreed, that some out-lines may have been traced by the original painter; yet would it be manifest, that several particular figures, and the composition of the whole system, is the work of bungling human pencils.

FROM a motley system thus framed the pretended internal evidences of divine revelation are drawn; and they are often drawn in such a manner, that he who might yield to external proofs is shocked at these instead of being confirmed by them. How should it be otherwise, when these proofs are not brought even as they are found in this motley system; and when they take the appearance, for they have often no more, of proofs, not from the plain text and tenor of the scriptures, but from the amplifications and conjectures of divines? These amplifications and conjectures take away the force of the proof, such as it is, by shewing too visibly that they are amplifications and conjectures: for it is not lawful to proceed in cases where divine, as in those where human, knowledge, wisdom, and authority

are alone concerned. In these, our endeavours to improve what we find are not only lawful, but laudable ; and it is no more reasonable that the authority of those men, who have gone before us, should fix the bounds of our enquiries, than it is that our authority should fix those of the men who are to come after us. Human science would have been long ago at a stand, if a contrary practice had prevailed universally, as we see it is, and has long been, in those particular countries where the contrary practice has so prevailed. But what is commendable in one case, is blamable in the other. We have no more right to add to the word of God, than we have to alter it : and the same revelation which gives us divine knowledge, in what proportion soever it be given, and how little soever it may satisfy our curiosity and our imaginary want, confines it likewise. The human master may tell us all he knows ; and we may carry knowledge much farther on his instructions, and on our own strength. But the divine master tells us no more than he judges it fit we should know ; and every step we attempt to make beyond his express revelation, and on our own strength, is a step we make in the dark, exposed to err, and sure not to know.

THO' I think that the internal evidences of a divine revelation neither are, nor can be, such positive proofs as they are pretended to be ; yet am I fully persuaded that reason ought to examine the inward character of a revelation, as

well as the outward testimony. Negative proof will supply the want of positive proof: and thus a sure and a real criterion will be found, instead of one that is equivocal at best, and imaginary. I will not perplex the argument by considering how far a conformity to the general experience of mankind is to be exacted in an history that relates principally to supernatural events; but I may insist that there is another conformity, a conformity to all we know of the Supreme Being, and of the law of our nature, so very essential to a revelation that pretends to come from God, that if any one thing repugnant to this knowledge be found in any history, or system of doctrine, they ought to be rejected, whatever proofs external or internal they may boast of a divine original. Tho' we hold no very exalted rank among the intellectual creatures of God, yet has he been pleased to give us faculties by which we are able, in using them well, to demonstrate all that he has judged necessary for us to know in our natural state, and without supernatural assistance, concerning his existence, his nature and attributes, his providence over his creatures, and their duties to him and to one another. We ought to acknowledge, with the utmost gratitude, the advantage of such a rank in the order of beings: and shall we dare to assume for true any facts, or any doctrines, that are evidently inconsistent with this knowledge, however even good men may endeavour to reconcile in opinion, by frivolous discourse, things that are irreconcilable



conciliable in nature, or whatever authority be employed to impose them? God forbid that we should. Right reason will never advise us to do so, and if any pretended revelation required that we should, it would prove itself to be false, for that very reason.

NATURAL revelation, so I will call it, produces knowledge, a series of sensitive and intuitive knowledge from the first principles to the last conclusions. The system of things that are, that is, the phaenomena of nature, are the first principles; and reason, that is, a real divine illumination, leads us from one necessary truth to another through the whole course of these demonstrations. In all these cases we know; we do not believe. But in the case of supernatural revelation, when it is traditional, we can have nothing more than opinion, supported by human authority, and by decreasing probability afterwards. The divine authority grows less and less apparent, whilst the obligation of submission to it is reputed still the same. But the certainty of natural revelation suffers no diminution; it is always original, and equally capable of forcing our assent in all times and places, because the principles by which it is manifested are equally objects of human sense and intellect, in all times and places. The missionary of supernatural religion appeals to the testimony of men he never knew, and of whom the infidel he labors to convert never heard, for the truth of those extraor-

dinary events which prove the revelation he preaches : and it is said that this objection was made at first to AUSTIN the monk by ETHELRED the Saxon king. But the missionary of natural religion can appeal at all times, and every where, to present and immediate evidence, to the testimony of sense and intellect, for the truth of those miracles which he brings in proof: the constitution of the mundane system being in a very proper sense an aggregate of miracles.

UPON the whole, let us suppose the historical and traditional authority, urged in proof of a revelation, to be carried as high as the nature of things will admit, on a concurrence of all the conditions necessary to establish such a probability, as ought to stand in lieu of certainty, in every other case, and as may induce us, in this case, to believe even in instances that are not at all conformable to general experience ; yet must we not receive it for true till we are sure, on the most careful examination and analysis, that it contains nothing unworthy of the majesty of the Supreme Being, nothing inconsistent with the demonstrated truths of natural religion. Profane history may contain such things as are not conformable to general experience, and be nevertheless credible in all other respects. But sacred history, the history of a divine revelation, that contains any one thing unworthy of the Supreme Being, or repugnant to the religion of nature, and to the most evident dictates of reason, ought

to be rejected with indignation, and will be so by every man who is afraid to blaspheme. There are many occasions on which we cannot discover the whole truth, and on which however we are very able to discern what implies contradiction with some self-evident, or demonstrated truth. This may be one of those: and on this we shall be sure not to err, if we persuade ourselves that the same God, who gave us reason to arrive at certainty in some cases, and at probability in various degrees in others, never designed that we should oppose probability, in any case, to certainty, nor believe against knowledge. Dr. BARROW, in a discourse concerning the virtue and reasonableness of faith, after begging the question long, and talking in a theological cant more worthy of PAUL than of a man like him, as he was bound by his profession to do, talks like a philosopher, and a man of superior sense. He says, that “if we seriously weigh the case, “we shall find that to require faith without “reason is to demand an impossibility; and “that God therefore neither doth, nor can en- “join us faith without reason.” Now I ask, if we are not obliged to believe without reason, can we be obliged to believe against it? He says, “that no man can believe he knoweth not “what nor why;” and therefore that he who “truly believeth, must apprehend the propo- “tion, and must discern its connection with “some principle of truth, which, as more noto- “rious to him, he before doth admit.” Now  
let

let me ask again, can any man be said to apprehend a proposition which contains a mystery, that is, something unintelligible; or any thing more than the sound of the words? Will not the argument against believing become still stronger, if a proposition is repugnant to any principles of truth, which we have before admitted on evident demonstration? I am proud to have doctor BARROW on my side; and will therefore conclude, as he does, that the man, who pretends to believe otherwise, “doth only pretend to believe out of some design, or from affection to some party: his faith is not so much really faith as hypocrisy, craft, fondness, or faction.”

THIS being premised, let us own that when a revelation has passed successfully through these trials, when it has all the authenticity of human testimony, when it appears consistent in all its parts, and when it contains nothing inconsistent with any real knowledge which we have of the supreme all-perfect Being, and of natural religion, such a revelation is to be received with the most profound reverence, the most intire submission, and the most unfeigned thanksgiving. Reason has exercised her whole prerogative then, and delivers us over to faith. To believe before all these trials, or to doubt after them, is alike unreasonable: for nothing can be more absurd and contemptible, than what St. AUSTIN somewhere or other, for in his works I have read it, advances about believing first, in hopes of under-  
standing

standing afterwards; which is a proposition much like that which CALVIN\*, as absurd and as dogmatical a father as AUSTIN, maintains, when he makes the authority of the scriptures to depend on the inward testimony of the Spirit alone; and then mentions the proofs proper to establish the authenticity and divinity of these books, as props, “adminicula,” that may help to support the faith they could not have raised.

#### S E C T. IV.

**I**F such absurdities as these have induced some to ridicule all religions that assume themselves founded on divine revelation, there are those who take occasion from the effects of them to form objections of a graver kind, and of greater consequence. These men would have it believed, that all such religions are incompatible with civil sovereignty; because they introduce a private conscience that may be, and often is, contrary to the public conscience of the state; and not only set up private judgment in opposition to that of the legislature, but enforce the dictates of it by a greater authority, even by that of God himself. The Jews were unsociable members of the great commonwealth of mankind: and the same private conscience, which determined them to the exercise of every kind of cruelty on other nations and other religions, made them rebels to government, even to their own, upon some

\* Vid. CALVIN's Institutes, lib. i. c. 8.

occasions,

occasions, and frequently persecutors and assassins of one another. They thought themselves authorised by their religion to commit such barbarities as even they perhaps, if they had had no religion, would not have committed; and zeal for it, that is, private conscience, inspired a sanguinary rage that might be called, very justly, religious madness. To subdue those, and reduce them to a state of servitude, who do not receive the Koran, is a first principle that made innumerable countries the scenes of slaughter and misery. MAHOMET, who taught it, practised it; and his successors have exercised the same violence as far as they have been able to carry their arms. But this violence is not confined to those whom they call infidels; for the sects of Omar and Aly detest each other as much as they both do Christianity: and the doctors of Mecca gave as good a bull to MIRIWEIS to satisfy private consciences in taking arms against the sophy, as any pope ever gave to justify rebellion, and the deposition of a lawful prince\*.

BUT to leave judaism and mahometism, and to speak of the Christian religion, against which the objection is particularly directed, and which I mean particularly to defend: it must be confessed, that from the time it made any figure in

\* N. B. A manuscript in the king of France's library, writ at the time, and on the spot, gives an account of a journey which MIRIWEIS made to Mecca for this purpose, before he invaded Persia and dethroned the sophy.

the world, it appeared divided into sects that even heathen persecution could not unite; and that from the time it became an established religion, it deluged the world with blood, at the suggestion, as well as under the pretence, of private conscience. Whatever sect prevailed, by ecclesiastical cabals, or by court intrigues, out of which the ladies \* were not always excluded, that sect dictated one public conscience in the religion of the state. Another sect, that prevailed at another time, or in another place, by much the same means, dictated another: and of this we need no other proof than the several revolutions from athanasianism to arianism, and from arianism to athanasianism. One alone could prevail at once: and as there were many, there was always a resistance of private to public conscience more or less open, and which broke out in mutiny or rebellion on one side, and in massacres and persecutions on the other, very frequently. How it happened, I know not. Let divines tell that, or rather let us forbear to pry over curiously into the secret dispositions of providence. But so it has happened, that the Christian religion has been attended by the same course of accidents as are common with it to every institution purely human. The best of these answer their end in part only from the first, and whilst

\* If IRENE had a determining influence over the fathers of the second Nicean council, there is room to think that another theological princess took part with EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia in the first.

the impreſſion of the force, that ſet them a going, laſts ; and never fail to ſlacken afterwards, or to take new impreſſions from contingent events, by which they degenerate, and become inſenſibly new inſtitutions under old names. A man who denies this, or who does not confeſs like CHARRON\*, that, “ after all, nothing ſhews more “ than religion the weakneſs of humanity,” is too ignorant or too diſingenuous to deſerve an answer. But as government is not to be baniſhed out of ſociety, and anarchy to be introduced ; becauſe government, inſtead of ſecuring the peace, and procuring the happineſs of ſtates, is often the cauſe of all their diſorders, and of their final ſubverſion : ſo neither is religion to be baniſhed out of government, becauſe inſtead of ſtrengthening and ſupporting, it ſerves often to weaken and to diſſolve, thoſe that are the moſt firmly eſtabliſhed.

WHAT is here ſaid of religion in general, is eminently true of Chriſtianity in particular. Tho’ this religion was born, if I may ſay ſo, in a deſert, and educated by a ſect of the moſt obſcure people in the Roman empire ; and tho’ it ſeemed calculated in many inſtances to be rather the inſtitution of an order of reformers, than of a national governing religion ; yet no religion ever appeared in the world, whoſe natural tendency was ſo much directed to promote the peace and happineſs of mankind. If it has had a contrary effect,

\* De la ſageſſe.



it has had it apparently, not really. Theology is in fault, not religion. Theology is a science that may be compared justly to the box of PANDORA. Many good things lie uppermost in it; but many evil lie under them, and scatter plagues and desolation through the world. If we cannot shut the box, it is of use, however, to know that the box is open; and to be convinced the more of this truth, let us make a general analyse of Christianity; and then observe, as generally, the rise, progress, and effects of theology.

## S E C T. V.

**I**N the first place then, Christianity is founded on the universal law of nature. I will not say that Christianity is a republication of it. But I will say that the gospel teaches the great and fundamental principle of this law, universal benevolence; recommends the precepts of it, and commands the observation of them in particular instances occasionally, always supposes them, always enforces them, and makes the law of right reason a law, in every possible definition of the word, beyond all cavil. I say beyond all cavil, because a great deal of silly cavil has been employed to perplex the plainest thing in nature, and the best determined signification of words according to the different occasions on which they are used.

I SHALL attempt, perhaps, at some other time,

to expose more fully the solemn trifling that has been employed on this subject, if what will be here said should not be thought sufficient, as I believe it ought to be.

WITHOUT entering therefore into metaphysical and logical refinements, concerning fitnesses and unfitnesses, resulting from the supposed eternal relations of things, which determine, according to some writers, the will of God himself; without amusing ourselves to distinguish between natural differences that arise in this manner, and moral differences that are said to arise from will alone; let us observe, that not only self-preservation, but a desire to be happy, are the immediate or improved effects of a natural instinct, the first in the whole animal kind; the last in the human species at least. As soon as men's appetites and passions are awake, they are determined by these to indulge every agreeable, and to abhor every disagreeable sensation: for pleasure, which is temporary, and therefore not real, happiness, passes for it, and is alone the object of appetite and passion. But as soon as their reason is formed, they discover the momentous difference between pleasure and happiness. Experience and reflection bring them acquainted with the system in which they are placed, and with the essential, I do not say eternal, differences of things according to the constitution of it; by which some tend to their pleasure, some to their happiness, some to both, and some to neither; or to the very contrary, to  
 pain

pain and misery. By these consequences they distinguish natures: and on these essential differences reason establishes the principles necessary to promote and secure the human happiness of every individual in the happiness of society. These principles are called, very properly, the laws of nature; because, altho' it be true that the Supreme Being willed into existence this system, as he did every other, and by consequence all the relations of things contained in it, yet it is not this will that imposes, in a state of nature, and among men who have no knowledge perhaps of their creator; it is in truth the constitution of the system alone that imposes these laws on mankind originally; whatever power made the system, or supposing it to have been never made: and when they are thus imposed, they determine the will of our species as effectually, and oblige as strongly, as the most powerful principle of human nature can determine and oblige human creatures.

I do not say that they have their effect absolutely, nor constantly. Appetite, passion, and the force of immediate objects, are often too hard for reason, even among those who hearken the most to her voice: and no wonder they should be so since they are too hard for revelation. If the law of nature, collected by human reason from the essential differences of things, cannot procure a perfect obedience from those who profess themselves subject to it, without the assistance

of civil laws, and political institutions, nor even with this assistance; so may we see, even in every Christian country, that the will of God, declared in his works, and in his word, cannot determine the rebellious will of man to conform to it in any near degree, even where it is enforced by the terrors of present, as well as future punishments, that are held out to the transgressors of it. If we consider effects, the law of nature is as much a law as the law of the gospel, and creates as really an obligation in choice to prefer good to evil. If we consider original institution and authority, it will not indeed correspond in the mind of a stratonian philosopher with his notion of an human law imposed by will; but he will be under no necessity of applying that notion to it. He may think, and call it, a law imposed on him by the operations of a superior, tho' unintelligent, power; the course of which he cannot alter, and must therefore conform himself to it in order to be happy: and something of this kind even GROTIUS\* was forced to allow, a little unwillingly, when he said — “*et hæc quidem — locum aliquem haberent etiamsi daremus — non esse Deum.*” The morality of actions does not, I think, consist in this, that they are prescribed by will, even the will of God; but in this, that they are the means, however imposed the practice of them may be, of acquiring happiness agreeable to our nature. Morality regards manners and the conduct of human

\* *De jure belli et pacis*, Proleg. 2.

life: and therefore I see as little reason to deny that atheists may have knowledge of the morality of actions, as I do to deny that the practice of this morality is enjoined by a law in the sense of obliging and binding; for if it should be said that it cannot pass for a law in this sense, because every man's own reason imposes it on him, and he cannot be at once the obliger and the obliged, the binder and the bound, I should think the sophism scarce worthy of an answer; or should content myself to inform the sophister, that there may be obligation without a law by will, and a law by will without obligation; and then leave him to ponder on the matter.

BUT now, tho' the law of nature be a law in a strict and proper sense, and as really promulgated by God in his works as it would have been in his word if he had spoke to his creatures, how much wrangling soever may be made by men, who frame and change definitions just as their different purposes require; yet is this law more completely and more effectually such to a thief, than to an atheist: and Mr. BAYLE's famous paradox can never be received for truth by common sense, nor by good policy. The same use of sense and reason shews to both the constitution of nature, the essential differences of things, and the obligations that have the force of laws derived from thence. But the former rises from a knowledge of the phaenomena to a knowledge of the God of nature, and in the

law he discovers the lawgiver. The atheist sees it is his interest, the theist sees it is his duty, to observe this law; and he adores the divine wisdom and goodness that have blended together so marvellously, and so graciously, his greatest interest and his greatest duty. Every kind of knowledge, whereof our nature is capable, combines to shew the theist that God speaks to man in his works, and signifies his will by them. He can neither be in doubt whether it is God who speaks, nor be at a loss to understand the divine language. An atheist who has much imagination, much elevation of mind, and a great warmth of inward sentiment, may, perhaps, contemplate the differences of things in abstract consideration, and contrast the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice till he falls in love, if I may use the expression after TULLY, with the former, and grows to abhor every appearance of the latter. He may create, in this manner, in himself, as it were, an artificial moral sense; for to assume any such natural instinct is as absurd as to assume innate ideas, or any other of the platonic whimsies. But how much more lively must this sense be in the theist, who knows not only that virtue is the perfection of his nature, but that he conforms himself by the practice of it to the designs of infinite wisdom, and co-operates in some sort with the Almighty?

As a knowledge of the essential differences of things may lead men, who know not God, to a  
know.

knowledge of the morality of actions; so do these essential differences serve as so many clues by which the thief may guide himself through all the intricacies of error and of disputation, to a knowledge of the will of God. Since infinite wisdom, that must always proportion means to ends, has made happiness the end or instinctive object of all his human creatures; and has so constituted them, and the system in which he has placed them, that they can neither attain to this happiness, nor be secure in the possession of it by any other means than the practice of morality, or the social virtues; it is demonstrated that God wills we should pursue these means to arrive at this end. We know more certainly the will of God in this way, than we can know it in any other. We may take the word of man for the word of God, and in fact this has been, and is still, the case of many. But we can never mistake the works of God for the works of men; and may be therefore assured that a revelation, evidently manifested in them, is a divine revelation. But tho' natural religion is an object of knowledge, and all other religions, even that of the gospel, can rest on nothing more than probability, yet may that probability be such, as will and ought to force our assent. He therefore, who thinks that the Christian religion is founded on such a probability, may affirm that the gospel, tho' he does not think it in propriety of speech a republication, is a confirmation, of

the law of nature, and renders this a law beyond all cavil about the term.

SANCTIONS of this law are implied in the theistical system; because it assumes, and to be sure very justly, that the general happiness, or misery, of mankind depends on the observation of this law; and that the degrees of one and the other bear always a proportion to the exercise, and to the neglect, of public and private virtue in every community. But these motives are such as particular men will be apt to think do not immediately, nor directly, concern them, because they are apt to consider themselves as individuals, rather than as members of society, and to catch at pleasure without any regard to happiness. To give an additional strength, therefore, to these motives, that are determining in their own nature, but not so according to the imperfection of ours; decisive to our reason, but not so to our appetites and passions, the ancient theists and polytheists, philosophers or legislators, invented another; that, I mean, of future rewards and punishments, represented under various forms, but always directed to the same purpose. This motive every man, who believes it, may, and must, apply to himself, and hope the reward, and fear the punishment, for his secret as well as public actions; nay, for his thoughts as well as his actions. What effect this motive had in remote antiquity, we cannot say; but



but it had lost its force long before the institution of Christianity. The fear of hell particularly was ridiculed by some of the greatest moralists: and to shew how little it was kept up in the minds of the vulgar, we may observe that TULLY \* treated it in some of his public pleadings as he would have avoided scrupulously to do, whatever he thought of it himself, if this fear had been at that time prevalent even among the vulgar.

THO' future rewards and punishments are not original nor direct sanctions of the law of nature, because not coeval with it; yet they became such when the Christian revelation was made. They are original sanctions of Christianity: and Christianity, which includes, was designed to enforce, the law of nature. We may, therefore, be allowed to wonder, and to seek the reason, why the law of nature, thus enforced, has served so little to correct the manners of men, and to promote the peace and happiness of the world: why Christianity has served, on the contrary, to

\* — quid tandem illi mali mors attulit? nisi forte ineptiis et fabulis ducimur, ut existimemus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre.—actum esse praecipitem in sceleratorum sedem atque regionem. Quae si falsa sunt, id quod omnes intelligunt; quid ei tandem aliud mors eripuit, praeter sensum doloris? PRO CLUENTIO.

Ut aliqua in vita formido improbis esset posita, apud inferos ejusmodi quaedam illi antiqui supplicia impiis constituta esse voluerunt: quod videlicet intelligebant, his remotis, non esse mortem ipsam pertimescendam. Orat. iv. in CATILIN.

determine men to violate the very law it confirms, and has opened a new source of mischief wherever it has prevailed. I said above that theology is in fault, not religion. We shall see this verified in every part of the analyis we make of Christianity. A few reflections will shew it to be so in this part, where we consider the gospel as a system of natural religion.

## S E C T. VI.

THE law of nature, then, or natural religion, as it is the most important, is the plainest of all laws; and if the heavens do not declare the will, as well as the glory of God, according to an observation my lord BACON \* makes in a chapter that contains some of the idols of the den, and of the theatre particularly; sure I am that the earth, and the inhabitants of it, declare both. The will of God has been revealed in his works to all those who have applied themselves to the contemplation of them, even to those who did not discover him in them, from the time that men have used their reason: and where reason improved, and knowledge increased, morality was carried as high in speculation, and in practice too, by some of the heathen worthies, as by any of the Christian saints; even as high as the very precept which the chancellor† quotes,  
and

\* De aug. scien. lib. ix. cap. 1.

† Diligite inimicos; benefacite his qui oderunt vos ———  
quæ certe verba plausum illum merentur, Nec vox homi-  
nem

and which he declares, a little rashly, to be more than human, and above the light of nature, since it was taught by some who had no other light. Notwithstanding this, divines, who cannot bear that the will, any more than the existence, of God should be deduced from his works, the clearest and the most authentic of all revelations, affirm against fact and reason both, that men may have indeed some true notions of virtue and vice, and of good and evil, by the light of nature, but that the moral law is too sublime for reason to attain to every part of it; and on this affirmation a great deal of theological policy has been established. Thus they give too another instance of their inconsistency: for nothing is more common than to find in their writings, nay in the course of the same argument, the religion of nature extolled as a perfect, and vilified as a most imperfect, system. Had these reverend persons been content to teach the duties of natural religion with evangelical simplicity, as CHRIST himself did in his sermon on the mount and elsewhere, they might have taught additional duties, and theological virtues, apart; and they might have enforced the whole, if they had pleased, by the heaven they promised, and by the hell they threatened.

Thus they might have preserved natural religion in the genuine purity of it. Instead of per-

*nem sonat; si quidem vox est, quae lumen naturae superat, ibi,*

plexing

plexing and corrupting it, they might have enabled every one to be his own casuist, and have made good men as well as Christians. But this method, which would have enlarged the kingdom of God, would not have enlarged, nor fortified, the theological empire. To do this the more effectually, it was necessary to maintain the insufficiency of human reason, tho' God thought it so sufficient, that he left the whole race of mankind, a few patriarchs and the chosen seed excepted, several thousand years under no other conduct. It was necessary to boast the necessity of a revelation that might supply the defects of reason, tho' this revelation remains, and has remained, from the time it was made, unknown to the far greatest part of mankind. It was necessary to make even the moral law a mystery, and such a mystery as could not be, on many occasions, unveiled without a profound knowledge of theology; which is a science that their order has imagined, and has reserved to itself. In this respect, the Christian priesthood has been wiser than the Heathen. The Heathen priests were wholly employed in teaching silly ceremonies, and celebrating the pompous rites of superstitious worship. They left the care of teaching the principles, and inculcating the obligations, of morality to philosophers; at least in the times with which we are best acquainted, this was the state of religion among the Pagans. But from the most early days of Christianity it has not been thus in the Christian church. The persons  
whom

whom we repute commissioned to instruct others in revealed religion have assumed the sole right of deciding in all cases concerning natural religion, that is, in almost all the most important affairs of public and private life.

By these means, and by these men, the moral law has been so intermixed with theology, and both of them have been so extended, and so perplexed, that the two plainest things in the world, and which would not have been fitted to the purpose of them, nor by consequence worthy of their author, if they had not been plain, the law of nature, and the law of grace, have been rendered voluminous, intricate, and contentious to such a degree, that the life of man is scarce long enough to attain a knowledge of them. Divines, who are supposed to have this knowledge, are therefore consulted like oracles; and till their decisions, like those of the others, and for some of the same reasons, began to lose their credit, their authority in the direction of private conscience was absolute, and extended from the prince to the peasant, who were alike under their influence. When they had decoyed mankind out of the plain into a wood, they who had planted the wood were necessary guides in it. Much ill use has been made of this authority, and much color given by it to the objection against religion, which we consider here: so much, that I apprehend there is no way to do right to Christianity, but that of imputing, as  
we

we do, consequences, that cannot be denied, to the corruption of religion by theology. This corruption has gone so far, that altho' it be of the last absurdity to affirm that any law can alter, much less contradict, that of nature, yet have men presumed to dispense with the observation of this law, to distinguish it away, to decide in direct opposition to it, and shamelessly to advance that the bishop of your church, for instance, has a power to alter the very nature of things. "*Jure potest contra jus decernere.*" Nay, BELLARMIN presumed to say, that if a pope should enjoin vices and forbid virtues, the Christian church would be obliged to believe vices good and virtues evil, or would sin against conscience. "*Nisi vellet contra conscientiam peccare.\**"

MORAL theology, which contains a super-ethical doctrine, as some grave divines have ridiculously called it, rendered the system of ethics in the writings of the ancient fathers and doctors of the Christian church more confused, less consistent, and often less moral, than we find it established in those of the Heathen; altho' no system can be more simple and plain than this of natural religion as it stands in the gospel. I do not pretend to criticise the Offices of St. AMBROSE, tho' he was a saint not very unlike our BECKET; but I will suppose that no man presumes to compare them in any respect to those of TULLY: and I

\* BELLARM. De pont.

will advance that TULLY would have blushed to own some of the moral doctrines of St. AUSTIN, tho' St. AUSTIN was, after St. PAUL, the great author of theological systems. This abuse of reason, and of revelation both, was never pushed so extravagantly, however, as it was by the school divines. These men, who sat ruminating in their cells on the very little they knew by experience and observation, and whose minds, therefore, were void of the true materials of knowledge, worked up, in place of them, all the entia rationis, all the chimeras of imagination that have no subsistence out of it, and pass under the name of metaphysics; all the useless definitions, frivolous distinctions, vain subtilties, and captious argumentations of logic. By them casuistry came into vogue, which has been called in French "*l'art de chicaner avec Dieu*:" as logic has been called "*l'art de chicaner avec les hommes*;" and we may call the whole tribe, as BUCHANAN called the Scotch and Irish scholastics particularly,

*Gens ratione furens, et mentem pasta chimaeris.*

Some divines have made men enthusiasts by straining the obligations of natural and revealed religion both so high, that they become almost inconceivable, and quite impracticable. Others again, scholastic divines and casuists especially, have so relaxed all these, and taught men so many ways of compounding, as it were, with God, that they are left at liberty, on many occasions,

casions, to indulge the excess of their passions. According to the first, a good Christian is an ideal man that never existed out of idea, as much as the sage of the Stoics. According to the last, the worst of men may be good Christians on earth, and saints in heaven. In short, they have divided the two laws that are intimately united in the gospel, have set them in opposition, and have very often made the violations of one pass for lawful means of promoting the other. The natural effect of religion is to help reason to subdue our passions; and of theology to help the passions to subdue reason and religion both, not only by indulgence to them, but by irritating the worst and most furious of them. History is full of such examples; and irreligious persons make use of them, unjustly, against Christianity.

## S E C T. VII.

**T**H E R E are two other parts, besides this of natural religion, into which Christianity may be analysed, and which have been corrupted alike by theology: duties superadded to those of the former; and articles of belief that reason neither could discover, nor can comprehend. As impracticable as some, and as incredible as others may seem, the duties required to be practised, and the propositions required to be believed, are concisely and plainly enough expressed in the gospel, in the original gospel properly so called, which



which Christ taught, and which his four evangelists recorded. But they have been rendered, since they were first published, and they began to be so as soon as they were published, extremely voluminous and intricate. The duties, external duties at least, have been multiplied by ecclesiastical policy, that profited of the natural superstition of mankind. The articles of belief have been multiplied, and complicated by cabalistical notions taken from the Jews, and by metaphysical refinements taken from heathen theology. Children suffer often for the sins of their fathers. But in this case the rule is inverted. The gospel gave birth to Christian theology, and the gospel suffers for the sins of her licentious offspring; of that ecclesiastical order, I mean, who, affecting to be called the religious, have proved themselves to be the most irreligious, society that was ever formed, and the most hurtful too; as he, who compares, through the whole series of their own history, the little good, with the infinite mischief, they have done, must confess.

It is common, and yet astonishing, to observe with how much solemnity and confidence almost all those, who teach and defend Christianity, presume to affirm any thing, tho' never so evidently false, that they imagine may serve to recommend it; and how by these means they do hurt, even where they intend to do good. They do hurt, most certainly, to the cause of religion :  
and

and the end is, in this case, so far from sanctifying the means, that the means disgrace the end. One artifice that they employ continually, is to confound, as much as they can, the want of power in the heathen world to reform the manners of men, by promoting effectually the practice of natural religion, and the want of a sufficient knowledge of this religion. That the heathen sages wanted this power is true; and that the apostles, saints, and doctors of Christianity have not had it, even with the help of a particular revelation, is true likewise: but it is as false to say that the former had not a sufficient knowledge of natural religion, as it would be to say that Christians have it not. The great book of nature lies open before us, and our natural reason enables us to read in it. Whatever it may contain, that cannot be thus read, cannot be called natural religion with any precision of ideas or propriety of words; nor will the example, that has been brought, of men who assent readily to truths consonant to their reason, which they receive from others, and would have found it hard to discover themselves, be made applicable to the present case, so as to destroy the distinction. Mr. LOCKE should have seen this sooner than any man: and one would think a reflection so obvious should escape no man. He did not, or he would not, make it. He seems to me, in the latter part of his Treatise concerning the Reasonableness of Christianity, not only to confound the want of sufficient means to propagate

pagate, and the want of sufficient means to know, the religion of nature, but to play so loosely in his expressions between this religion and the Christian, that it is hard to distinguish sometimes what he intends ; whether he intends means of propagating or means of knowing ; to what sense he confines natural, and to what revealed, religion. Thus much, however, is very clear : he asserts the insufficiency of “ human reason, “ unassisted by revelation, in its great and proper business of morality.” Human reason, he says, “ never made out an entire body of “ the law of nature from unquestionable principles, or by clear deductions. Scattered sayings, — incoherent apothegms of philosophers and wise men — could never make a “ morality — could never rise to the force of a “ law.” These assertions now are in part, and in part only, true. But when he comes to contrast this supposed imperfect knowledge of the religion of nature, which the heathen had, with that supposed perfect knowledge which is communicated by the gospel, what he advances stands in direct contradiction to truth. It is not true, that CHRIST revealed an entire body of ethics, proved to be the law of nature from principles of reason, and reaching all the duties of life. If mankind wanted such a code, to which recourse might be had on every occasion, as to an unerring rule in every part of the moral duties, such a code is still wanting ; for the gospel is not such a code. Moral obligations are occasionally

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recommended and commanded in it, but no where  
proved from principles of reason, and by clear  
deductions, unless allusions, parables, and com-  
parisons, and promises, and threats, are to pass  
for such. Were all the precepts of this kind,  
that are scattered about in the whole New Tes-  
tament, collected, like the short sentences of  
ancient sages in the memorials we have of them,  
and put together in the very words of the sacred  
writers, they would compose a very short, as  
well as unconnected system of ethics. A system  
thus collected from the writings of ancient hea-  
then moralists, of TULLY, of SENECA, of EPIC-  
TETUS, and others, would be more full, more  
entire, more coherent, and more clearly deduced  
from unquestionable principles of knowledge.  
Nor must we think that this takes off from the  
dignity, the authority, or the utility, even in  
moral doctrines, of revealed religion. The law  
of nature was sufficiently known, and the teach-  
ers of it, who made no pretence to any divine  
mission, had pressed it on the minds and consci-  
ences of mankind, the sole way they could press  
it, by arguments drawn from the reason of  
things. Revelation was not given to do what  
reason could do alone. It was not given to con-  
vince men of the reasonableness of morality,  
but to enforce the practice of it by a superior  
authority.

If there was any thing like a complete system  
of morality in the gospel, we should find it in  
the

the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. MATTHEW, since they contain a sermon preached by CHRIST himself, not on any one particular doctrine, but on the whole duty of man. What now do we find in them? Many excellent precepts of morality, no doubt, intermingled with, and enforced by, several considerations drawn from his own revelations; and yet such as the law of nature enjoins, or implies, and as have been practised by philosophers, and other good men, among the heathen. Some of these, and some others that we find interspersed in the gospels, are such as may be reckoned of the kind of those which St. AUSTIN calls “*sublimiora praecepta*,” not so much positive duties, as instances of greater purity and Christian perfection, and rather recommended than commanded. Thus, for instance, wherever marriage has been instituted, adultery has been forbid. It was so by the mosaic law, it is so by the law of nature; for tho’ marriage be not directly instituted by this law, yet every wrong, every invasion of another man’s property, and every injustice, is forbid by it. Now the gospel carries this duty much farther, and declares, that “*whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*” The law that forbids the commission of a crime, does certainly imply that we should not desire to commit it; for to want the desire, or to be able to extinguish it, is the best security of our obedience; tho’ he who is unable to extinguish it, and

yet abstains from the sin, has in the eye of reason a greater degree of merit. Reason commanded what a man may by the force of reason perform. Revelation commands what it is impossible to obey, without an assistance unknown to reason. Thus again, murder is forbid by the law of nature, but even anger is forbid by this; and universal benevolence, that great principle of the first, is strained by the last to a love of our enemies and persecutors: a precept so sublime, that I doubt whether it was ever exactly observed any more under the law of grace, than under the law of nature; tho' some appearances of it may be found, perhaps, under both, and at least as many under one as under the other. These sublime precepts, which are peculiarly Christian, and seem designed to characterise Christianity, have not been observed by the professors of it, either ancient or modern. The quaker who says yea yea, and nay nay, and doth not swear at all, does not willingly part with his coat as well as his cloak, nor give away one, because the other has been taken from him; neither does the good man neglect to lay up some treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. It has occurred to me often, that the same reason may be given for these sublime precepts, which TULLY gives somewhere for the severer doctrines of the Stoics. Men will always stop short of that pitch of virtue which is proposed to them, and it is therefore right to carry the notions of  
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it as high as possible. Whether this reason will be admitted or no, I cannot tell. It seems to me the best that can be given, "*et valeat quantum valere potest.*" In all cases these sublime precepts are so little consistent with the law of nature, that they are by this very law carried beyond the original terms of it.

THERE are besides these general duties, and others of the same kind commanded, or recommended, by the gospel; some that seem directed to the Jews only, and some that seem directed more immediately to the disciples of CHRIST. Of the first sort is that injunction which restrains divorces to the case of adultery; whereas by the law of MOSES, as well as by those of other legislators, a man who did not like his wife, nor care to cohabit with her, might give her a letter of divorce, and turn her out of his doors; for which express leave is given in Deuteronomy \*. Of the same sort are those directions which tend to render the worship of God more intellectual, and the practice of good works less ostentatious. The heathen fasted and prayed, and exercised charity as well as the Jews. But the divine worship of both consisted in a multitude of external duties, and in pompous rites and ceremonies; and the Jews are taxed particularly with hypocrisy, and with an affectation of doing acts of charity in public, in the streets, and the synagogues, in order to gratify their vanity, and to

\* Chap. xxiv.

be applauded by the public. Of the second sort are certain duties enjoined in this sermon, and in other parts of the gospel, which seem fit enough for a religious sect, or order of men like the essenians, but are by no means practicable in the general society of mankind. To resist no injury, to take no care for to-morrow, to neglect providing for the common necessaries of life, and to sell all to follow CHRIST, might be properly exacted from those who were his companions, and his disciples in a stricter sense, like the scholars of PYTHAGORAS, admitted within the curtain; but reason and experience both shew that, considered as general duties, they are impracticable, inconsistent with natural instinct, as well as law, and quite destructive of society. They have not been therefore considered as such. They have been laid aside, and nothing more than a pretended observation of them has been kept up by some of the monastic orders.

If this now be, as it is most certainly, a true, tho' general and short, representation of the moral duties contained in the gospel, and added to those of natural religion, both which consist in piety towards God, and benevolence towards man; will any disciple of the philosopher of Malmesbury presume to maintain, that the objection raised against religion has the least force on account of them, or that they render it inconsistent with civil sovereignty? He who should maintain it, would fall below notice, and not deserve an answer.



answer. But if the objection be levelled against the numberless duties superadded to those of the gospel, instead of being levelled against the few that have been superadded by the gospel to those of natural religion, it will be unanswerable. Those of the former sort have been so increased, especially in matters of rites, of ceremonies, and of external devotion, by the authority of the church, and in the course of ages, that they overload and stifle, as it were, true religion; nay, that they substitute in lieu of it a carnal religion, such as that of the Jews, and those of paganism were. That the religion instituted by Moses was such in outward appearance, “in frontispicio” “quidem,” says SPENCER, our divines admit. But they assert that inwardly, “in penetrali,” it was divine and mystic. The heathen said the same of theirs; and in truth, if theirs were not very divine, they were very mystical. Christianity has completed the round, and has been brought back, in many countries at least, from the simplicity of the gospel to the pageantry and superstition of heathen and Jewish observances.

THE sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper are certainly divine ceremonies, since they were instituted by CHRIST himself; and they may be said to be mystical too, because they are intended to be visible signs of something invisible. Baptism, or washing, is necessary to cleanliness and health, in warm countries especially. But it was soon adopted by those who instituted

religions, and applied it to inward, as well as outward, purification. It was so among the heathen, it was so among the Jews, it is so at this day among the idolaters in Indostan, and among the Mahometans. The heathen had their public and private purifications, and we know, by other proofs besides the acknowledgment of St. AUSTIN, that baptism was one of them. We know too, that the pagan ceremonies of purification had a spiritual meaning, and were intended to keep up a sense of religion in the minds of men. “*Caste jubet lex adire ad deos,*” says TULLY \*, “*animo videlicet — nec tollit castimoniam corporis.*” The Jews employed several kinds of baptism. They baptised even their household goods. Every kind had a mystical signification, and the proselytes to the law of MOSES, who were baptised as well as circumcised, were understood to be regenerated as well as purified. The proselyte became a new man by this ceremony, retained nothing of his former state, and even his parents ceased to be reputed such. The precursor of CHRIST instituted a baptism of repentance; and even CHRIST himself, who had not certainly any need of repentance, insisted to be baptised in the Jordan, as he was after some modest resistance on the part of JOHN. He was not only baptised before he began his mission, but he instituted this ceremony at the close of it, when he ordered his disciples

\* Lib. ii. de legib.

to “ baptise all nations in the name of the Father,  
“ the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

THE communion or the sacrament of the Lord's supper is another, and the only other, religious ceremony instituted by the same divine authority. We hear something of symbols of bread, and symbols of the cup, which cup was of water, that were used in the mysteries of MITHRAS, and in others. There is, I think, no room to suspect that the Christian communion bore any allusion to those rites in its institution, whatever it did afterwards. But the Jews had their passover, and in imitation of that feast, as well as on occasion of it, CHRIST instituted his supper. One was designed to preserve the memory of the exode, before which a destroying angel passed over the houses of the Israelites, and put the first-born of the Egyptians to death. The other was designed to preserve the memory of the death of CHRIST, which was then near, which he assured his disciples had been foretold by the prophets, and would be effectual to the redemption of mankind, and to the remission of sin. No institutions can be imagined more simple, nor more void of all those pompous rites and theatrical representations that abounded in the religious worship of the heathen and the Jews, than these two were in their origin. They were not only innocent, but profitable, ceremonies, because they were extremely proper to keep up the spirit of true natural religion, by keeping up  
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that of Christianity, and to promote the observation of moral duties, by maintaining a respect for the revelation that confirmed them. But they were soon perverted by the fathers of the church, who trusted so little to the providence of God for the propagation of this religion, that they employed the lowest tricks of human policy for the purpose. They added another stage of external observances, if I may say so, in the progress of converts to Christianity, and modelled the ceremonies of it on the plan of those heathen mysteries, against which they declaimed so bitterly ; for the good men were apt to be bitter, as well as inconsistent. Baptism was the ceremony of purgation that preceded initiation. Neither children nor others were admitted to it, till by exorcisms, and the blowing of the priests upon them, the impure spirits were driven from them. Blowing was the first, washing the second, part of this purgation. They who had gone through both were fitted to receive the influences of grace. They were the catechumens, the initiated, who partook of the first and least mysteries : and the complete or perfect Christians were those, who not only partook of the greatest, the communion, but were let into the whole secret of it. This third stage was that of consummation, according to Christian, as well as heathen, theology : and it would scarce be possible to believe, that the greatest saints and doctors of the church had talked so much blasphemous nonsense, and employed so much artifice about it,

it, if their writings were not extant, and if we did not see in them, that deification in another life was promised to those who received the Christian sacraments with faith; as it had been promised to those who went piously through all the mysterious ceremonies of heathenism. It would be scarce possible to believe that even *ATHANASIUS*, as well known as he is by his creed and by other circumstances, could have had the front to assert, that men are united to the godhead by a participation of the spirit, "*participatione Spiritus conjungimur deitati*;" which participation is the effect of these sacraments, of that particularly, which was called "*magnum et pavendum mysterium*," and the sacrament "*eminentiae gratia*," as it was then, and as it is at this hour. It would be tedious to descend into a greater detail here. If you have a mind at any time to do so, you may consult, among other writings, the sixteenth exercitation of *CASAUBON* against *BARONIUS*, where you will find enough to satisfy your curiosity, and more than enough to raise your surprise. All I shall say more concerning these two religious ceremonies, instituted by *CHRIST*, is this; baptism has been kept at no very great distance from the simplicity of its original, and the little alteration that has been made, leaving it as much a sign as it was before, and, no doubt, as effectual as it was before to every other purpose, renders the ceremony more decent by sprinkling only with water, according to the practice of the western churches,

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than it would be by a total immersion, according to that of the primitive church, and of the oriental churches, if I mistake not, even at this time. But the other institution has been so disguised by ornament, and so much directed, in your church at least, to a different purpose from commemoration, that, if the disciples were to assemble at Easter in the chapel of his holiness, PETER would know his successor as little as CHRIST would acknowledge his vicar, and the rest would be unable to guess what the ceremony represented, or intended.

It would be still more tedious to descend into an enumeration of all the impositions, which the church has laid on the Christian world. New powers, new rights, new duties, new sins, new ceremonies, new observances to be practised from the birth to the death of every man, all tending to the profit of the clergy, none founded on the plain authority, and many established in direct contradiction to the spirit, and to the letter of the gospel. Judaism and paganism gave occasion to them. They were derived from thence. They are no parts of the Christian system: CHRIST had no share in their institution. The manner indeed in which the gospel was published, and much more the manner in which it was propagated, might lead designing, enthusiastical, and superstitious men, to graft all these foreign branches on the stock of genuine Christianity. CHRIST himself was, in outward appearance,

ance, a Jew. He ordered his disciples, and the crowds that followed him, to observe and do whatever the scribes and pharisees, who sat in the chair of MOSES, should direct\*. He only warned them against the examples that these men gave, who did not practise what they taught, “dicunt enim et non faciunt.” He was a better Jew than they, and he exhorted others to be the same. It is true that he commissioned his apostles to teach and baptise all nations †, when he gave them his last instructions. But he meant no more, perhaps, by all nations, than the Jews dispersed into all nations, since he had before that time forbid them to go into the ways of the Gentiles, and into the cities of the Samaritans ‡. He sent them rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and declared this in a very remarkable manner to be the object of his own mission, by the language he held to the Canaanite woman. She endeavoured in vain to move his compassion. He told her it was not fit to take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs || : nor did he relent and cure her daughter, till he was overcome by her importunity and her faith.

THESE declarations of JESUS before his crucifixion, and the charge he gave to his disciples after his resurrection, might embarrass them a little, and might cause some difference of opinion

\* MATT. chap. xxiii.  
|| Ibid. xv.

† Ibid. xxviii.

‡ Ibid. x.

among them at their first setting out. So it happened: and tho' a predilection for the Jews, and a strong attachment to the observances of the law, might have been expected from St. PAUL, a zealous pharisee, who had been bred at the feet of GAMALIEL, rather than from St. PETER, a poor ignorant fisherman; yet St. PAUL distinguished himself as the apostle of the Gentiles, and alledged, that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto him, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto PETER\*. It is probable, that the first had made a reflection early, and had seen it confirmed by experience, as soon as he entered on his apostolical mission, that escaped the second. The reflection I mean is this, that the contempt and aversion, in which both the nation and the religion of the Jews were held by the rest of mankind, would make it much more easy to convert the Gentiles at once to Christianity, than to make them Jews first, in order to make them Christians afterwards. The council of the apostles and the elders at Jerusalem, to which PAUL and BARNABAS were deputed from Antioch, where the dispute about circumcising the Gentile converts had been carried even into mutiny, was of the same mind. Nay, St. PETER † himself spoke on that side of the question, how much soever he trimmed when St. PAUL withstood him to his face ‡, and reproved him for his dissimulation, and the bad example he gave.

\* Gal. ii.

† Acts xv.

‡ Gal. ii.



It is evident, that indulgence to the Jews and to the Gentiles, in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apostolical conduct from the first preaching of the gospel. PETER conversed and eat with the Gentiles at Antioch, till the arrival of certain Jews made him separate himself from the former, fearing them which were of the circumcision: and PAUL, who reproached this prince of the apostles so harshly for his hypocrisy, if he did not dissemble to the elders the doctrine he taught to the Gentiles, did at least dissemble so far to the public, when he came to Jerusalem and joined in the most solemn act, that the most rigid observers of the law could perform, as to express a zeal for observances he did not much value, and for a law he thought abrogated; for that was the case, and that doctrine is inculcated throughout his epistles. In short, he carried his indulgence so far, or he dissembled so far, that he became as a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews, and to them that are without law, that is, to the Gentiles, as without law, that he might gain them too \*. We have his own word for this, and he boasts of it.

By such prudent conduct, the gospel was successfully propagated, and converts flocked apace into the pale of Christianity from these different and opposite quarters; from which it is no won-

\* 1 Cor. Chap. ix.

der that they brought along with them several of their former usages, rites, and ceremonies.

ABSTINENCE from things strangled and from blood had been constantly observed by the Jews, and was one of the conditions imposed by the Christian church on the Gentiles received into it. This condition was confirmed by the apostolical constitutions, and enforced, I believe, by penalties more severe, in some of the imperial. It remained long in general practice among the Christians of the east, and is perhaps even now practised by several of those churches. But in the west it was soon abandoned, and will not be revived again by the zeal of our acquaintance Dr. DELANY. Abstinence likewise from all kinds of nourishment, or the most rigorous fasting on solemn occasions, had been observed in the Jewish church, and is observed still by the Christian churches of the east; for as to those of the west, they cannot be said to fast, when their manner is compared with that of the others, or with that of the Mahometans: they may be said rather to feast very often, and only to change one kind of luxury for another.

THESE observances were of mere pagan or Jewish original. Others were of a mixed kind. MOSES had made the destruction of idolatrous worship a principal object of his law; and the zeal against images was great among the Jews. But they made a distinction, which the casuists  
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of the upper Egypt did not make, I presume, formerly; and which those of Mecca would not admit now. Images carved or embossed were held in horror: but a flat figure, either painted or embroidered, was allowed. A passage which I have read, quoted from MAIMONIDES\*, is very express and very clear on this subject. Pictures being thus introduced from Judaism, statues soon followed from the Pagan worship: and the western churches, if not the eastern, who kept more nearly to the Jewish customs, were furnished like Heathen temples. Confession of sins was in use among the Heathen, so it was among the Jews; so it was, and so it is, among Christians; and several forms of it have been prescribed. Penance and expiation followed both in the Pagan and Jewish churches: they were derived into the Christian, and they have been often costly in all three. One sort of penance obtained in the two last indeed, which I do not remember to have obtained in the first, that of flagellation: a sort of penance which has since been applied, as the learned MEIBOMIUS assures us, to a very different and unholy purpose. In the synagogue, it is said that the penitents flogged one another: but your church, like a more indulgent mother,

\* LUD. Com. ad hist. aethiop. Sed hoc capiendum de imagine, quae protuberat, quales sunt figurae ac sculpturae in palatiis, et his similes. Talem igitur si quis fecerit, vapulat. Sin autem figura sit depressa, vel coloribus expressa, uti illae, quae in tabulis mensivae fiunt, aut quae intextae operi textorio, pro licitis habentur.

allows every one to flog himself, and to proportion the penance to the tenderness of his conscience, and the tenderness of his skin.

BUT to what purpose should I mention any more of these particulars? A multitude of such ceremonious, not to say superstitious rites, have been adopted by the Christian church, tho' neither commanded, nor even recommended, by the gospel. For this reason, the apostles do not seem to have been very intent about these, or any other forms of external service. They seem to have distinguished rightly between the end and the means: the end immutable, as a religion given by God must necessarily be: the discipline, or means of supporting it, mutable, as the ordinances of men must be according to the vicissitude of circumstances, and the fluctuation of human affairs. But their successors did, and have done ever since, the very reverse of this: and it is astonishing to observe what a bustle they made, and what contests they had about the time of keeping Easter, and other points of discipline and ceremony, which the apostles had not thought of importance enough to deserve their decision, nor even their notice. All these fluctuated therefore extremely in the same churches, and varied in different churches, during the first ages of Christianity, and especially until the synagogue was honorably buried\*, if it can be

\* — Donec synagoga honorifice sepulta fuerit. Card. Eon. De rebus liter. lib. i.

said to be so even at this day. I interpose this doubt, not only because there remains a tang of Judaism among several of the eastern sects, which will not appear strange to those who know that the Christian church of Jerusalem judaised during a succession of fifteen bishops; but because the western sect, your pretended catholic church, instead of asserting evangelical freedom from the bondage of the Mosaical law, or rather whilst she asserts it, has introduced many things from this very law, and has the front to justify them on the authority of it, under a new dispensation that takes all authority from it, according to St. PAUL. Ointment, holy water, incense, tapers, the consecration of altars, and the celebration of jubilees, are of this kind. But I think that your doctors would not found so high this authority, if these things were alone concerned. There are others which import them more, and which they have been obliged to establish on Jewish authority, for want of any better; and it is for the sake of such institutions that they have deemed it expedient to accustom men to respect this authority on other occasions, on such particularly as relate to the immediate service of God, of which custom, not reason nor revelation most certainly, has made them to pass for essential parts. The divine right of tithes was established by the law of MOSES. By virtue of that law, the Christian priesthood claim it. The nasi was the pontiff of the Jews, and the head of their church. From hence an argument the more for the supreme

authority of the pope. Councils are derived from the sanhedrin ; and the whole system of the hierarchy and of ecclesiastical regimen from the constitution of the Jewish church. I take no notice here of the share which Paganism had in all that has been mentioned, either immediately, or mediately through Judaism. Enough is said for my present purpose : and observations of that sort will be more necessary under another head.

LET those now, who object to religion on account of external duties, rites, ceremonies, and ecclesiastical institutions, learn to be more just in their censures. Let them learn to distinguish rightly between those things which the gospel requires, and those which the church imposes. If they do not make this distinction, their objections are trifling ; and if they do make it, they may have the concurrence of every sincere and intelligent Christian along with them, for reasons which are not theirs indeed, since they are intended to strengthen and confirm, not to weaken nor explode, religion. When we consider how strong the impressions of sense are, and how they are apt to control that which should control them, we may find, perhaps, very sufficient reason to incline us to approve in general the use of ceremonies and the pomp of external service in religion. To keep up a sense of it in the minds of men, there seem to be but two ways. To strike the senses frequently by public and solemn acts of religious worship ; and to  
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heat the brain by notions of an inward operation of the Spirit, and of a sort of mystical devotion independent of outward forms, or even inconsistent with them. One of these leads to superstition, the other to enthusiasm. Both are silly: but the last is bad in this respect, it is less governable and less curable. Superstition is folly. Enthusiasm is madness. It is good to be on our guard against both. But I am to speak in this place of the first alone: and as to that, the solemn magnificence of a church, the grave and moving harmony of music, the pomp and order of ceremonies decently performed, the composed looks, and the mystical vestments of the priests who perform them; all this, I think, cannot fail to inspire an awful respect, and to maintain a devout attention of mind in the generality. Here and there a man, perhaps, may take these ceremonies, and those who perform them, for what they are; and not be imposed upon by them, either before or after the celebration of such rites as these. But during the celebration of them, whilst the spectacle is before his eyes, and the sound in his ears, I think that the same impressions will be made in some degree even on such a man as this. You and I knew BETTERTON and Mrs. BARRY off the stage, as well as on it; and yet I am persuaded neither of us could ever see JAFFIER and BELVIDERA without horror and compassion. I do not pretend to decide in the dispute about the pomp of external service; I only speak according to what I have felt. But

tho' I do not take part, on the whole, for the use or disuse of church ceremonies, it may be allowed me to declare against the abuse of them all, as a friend, not as an enemy, to religion. It is certain that this abuse has defeated the very end to which they were directed, or which served as a reason for the introduction of them; and has substituted something, which is not religion, in the place of it. Our spiritual guides have run into very wild extremes. Some have shewed a great disregard to good works, and have talked of justifying faith alone, as the sole means of salvation, and in contradistinction to good works; like the Scotch presbyterian parson, who assured his brethren from the pulpit, that immorality had destroyed it's thousands, but morality it's ten thousands. Others have insisted much on good works, but they have confounded the nature of them. They have rather meant, by good works, the practice of arbitrary duties, which ecclesiastical discipline has established, or ecclesiastical authority recommended, and which are beggarly elements indeed, than the practice of those moral duties which reason prescribes as well as revelation. How much they prefer the former to the latter, may appear by the universal practice of most Christian countries. In some, the man who stabs his enemy goes to confession, and his conscience is never at quiet till he has purchased absolution by money, or by penance, or by both. The woman who lies in the arms of her adulterer will leap out of bed, and knock her forehead,



forehead, and beat her breast, at the tinkling of a little bell in the street. Nay, in the country where I have passed so many years of my life, where bigotry is less prevalent, generally speaking, than in others of the same communion, the poor man who has eat an egg in lent, when eggs have not been permitted by the bishop, and who had perhaps nothing else to eat, cannot be absolved of this heinous sin by the same priest that might absolve him for neglecting the worship, or offending against the law of God. The former sin is of a blacker dye than these, and he must have recourse for absolution to an higher authority: which is an imitation of the Jews likewise, among whom any offence against the ritual law was punished more severely than crimes much more grievous in their nature, as I believe it has been observed already after Dr. SPENCER. But enough has been said concerning duties added by the gospel to natural religion, and duties added by the church to those of both. It is time to speak of articles of faith, which make a third and last part of the analyse of Christianity.

## S E C T. VIII.

**I**T is this part that has furnished matter of strife, contention, and all uncharitableness, even in, as well as from, the apostolical age. It is this that has added a motive the more, and one that is stronger than any other, to animosity and hatred, to wars and massacres, and to that cruel principle

ple which was never known till Christians introduced it into the world, to persecution for opinions, for opinions often of the most abstract speculation, and of the least importance to civil or religious interests. It is this, in short, whose effects have been so fatal to the peace and happiness of mankind, that nothing, which the enemies of religion can say on the subject, will be exaggerated beyond the truth. But still the charge they bring will be unjustly brought. These effects have not been caused by the gospel, but by the system raised upon it: not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men. We distinguished before between the original and the traditional proofs, and we must distinguish here between the original and traditional matter of these revelations. The gospel of CHRIST is one thing, the gospel of St. PAUL, and of all those who have grafted after him on the same stock, is another.

I WILL not say that one article of belief alone is necessary to make men Christians, the belief that JESUS was the Messiah promised to the Jews, and foretold by their prophets. This may be the primary, but it is not the sole object of our faith. There are other things doubtless, contained in the revelation he made of himself, dependent on, and relative to, this article, without the belief of which I suppose that our Christianity would be very defective. But this I say: the articles of belief, which CHRIST himself exacted by what  
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he said, and by what he did, have been lengthened immeasurably, and, we may add, both unnecessarily and presumptuously, by others since his time. The system of religion which CHRIST published, and his evangelist recorded, is a complete system to all the purposes of true religion, natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former, it enforces them by asserting the divine mission of the publisher, who proved his assertions at the same time by his miracles: and it enforces the whole law of faith by promising rewards, and threatening punishments, which he declares he will distribute when he comes to judge the world. Besides which, if we do not acknowledge the system of belief and practice, which JESUS, the finisher as well as author of our faith, left behind him, to be, in the extent in which he revealed and left it, complete and perfect, we must be reduced to the grossest absurdity, and to little less than blasphemy.

THESE reasons, which cut up the root of artificial theology, deserve, for that reason, to be more fully explained. If we do not acknowledge them, we assume that the Son of God, who was sent by the Father to make a new covenant with mankind, and to establish a spiritual kingdom on the ruins of paganism, and the reformation at least of judaism, executed his commission imperfectly; we assume, that he died to redeem mankind from sin, and from death, the wages of sin, but that he left them at the same

time without sufficient information concerning that faith in him, and that obedience to his law, which could alone make this redemption effectual to all the gracious purposes of it ; since we might rise to immortality indeed by the merits of his passion, but this resurrection might be to damnation too, unless an entire faith in him, co-operating with our imperfect obedience, justified and saved us. In short, we assume that they, who were converted to Christianity by CHRIST himself, and who died before the supposed imperfection of his revelation had been supplied by the apostles, by PAUL particularly, lived and died without a sufficient knowledge of the terms of salvation ; than which nothing can be said more abominable. Natural religion may be collected, slowly perhaps, tho' sufficiently by natural reason, from the works of God, wherein he manifests his will to mankind. But a religion, revealed by God himself immediately, must have been complete and perfect, from the first promulgation, in the mind of every convert to it, according to all our ideas of order : and if we consider it as a covenant of grace, the covenant must have been made at once, according to all these ideas, and all those of justice. No new articles of belief, no new duties, could be made necessary to salvation afterwards, without changing the covenant : and at that rate how many new covenants might there not be ? How often, I say it with horror, might not God change his mind ?

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WILL it be urged, as an answer to what has been said, that the explanations and additions, which have been made, were made by the same authority that made the original covenant, in order to ascertain the terms, and to secure the effect, of it; and that there is therefore no reason to find fault that they were made? But if this should be said, instead of removing one absurdity and profanation, it will only serve to advance another. The force of the objection rests on the very assertion contained in the answer, on the sameness of the authority. If the additions were not said to be made by the same authority, they would be entitled to little regard, and the objection would vanish. But since they are said to be so made, and since they make a change in the covenant, for a covenant is changed by additional conditions, tho' the original remain still in force, the objection is confirmed by the answer; and a farther absurdity arises from it, or the same absurdity appears in a new light. If it was necessary that the apostles, who were filled with the Holy Ghost, or other inspired persons, should publish, by the assistance of the Spirit, any knowledge necessary to salvation, which Jesus had not taught, or explain the covenant of grace more perfectly than he had done, it follows, that the third person of the Trinity was employed to assist the second in making a more full and perfect publication of the gospel: which comes too near the case of poor mortals, who want this assistance to receive  
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and practise the gospel as they ought, and to whom it is given to supply the imperfection of their nature. Upon the whole, have we not reason to distinguish with an holy fear between the original system of Christianity, and the very best, if that could be ascertained, of all those discordant systems into which the pure ore of the gospel has been so often melted down and cast anew, during seventeen centuries, at different times; and every time with such a mixture of human alloy, that no one of them can carry, without fraud, the image and superscription of our heavenly CAESAR?

CHRISTIANITY, as it stands in the gospel, contains not only a complete, but a very plain system of religion; it is in truth the system of natural religion: and such it might have continued, to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was originally taught by CHRIST himself. But this could not have happened, unless it had pleased the divine providence to preserve the purity of it by constant interpositions, and by extraordinary means sufficient to alter the ordinary course of things. Such a constant interposition, and such extraordinary means, not being employed, Christianity was left very soon to shift for itself, in the midst of a frantic world, and in an age when the most licentious reasonings, and the most extravagant superstitions, in opinion and practice, prevailed univer-  
sally

fally under the respectable names of theology and metaphysics; and when the Jews themselves, on whose religion, and on the authority of whose scriptures, Christianity was founded, had already gone far in corrupting both by oral traditions and cabalistical whimsies, by a mixture of notions taken from the Chaldaic philosophy during their captivity, and from the Grecian philosophy since the expedition of ALEXANDER. The traces of these mixtures are discernible: those of Greek origin most manifestly; and among them, those of Platonism are so strongly marked, that it is impossible to mistake them. This philosophy was the very quintessence of the theology and metaphysics which PLATO, and PYTHAGORAS before him, had imported into Greece. It had been extracted by the intense heat of the warmest imagination that ever Greece produced, and had contributed more, than any other system of paganism, to turn theists into enthusiasts, and to confirm that fondness for mystery, without an air of which no doctrine could pass for divine. What effect all these circumstances had on Christianity, and how they served to raise an intricate, voluminous, and contentious science on foundations of the greatest simplicity and plainness, it may be worth while to examine more particularly, and in such a detail as the nature of these essays, which are not designed to be treatises, and my confined knowledge of antiquity permit. The extent of one and the other will be sufficient, perhaps, for our purpose.

## S E C T. IX.

**M**EN have accustomed themselves to talk so vaguely about mysteries, that the very meaning of the word is become a mystery. The whole New Testament has been called the gospel, and the whole gospel a mystery: both very improperly; for the first confounds what should be always distinguished in favor of the original system of Christianity: and the second is absurd in the highest degree, since nothing can be conceived to be more so, than to predicate two contradictory terms of the same subject. To affirm, that a thing is and is not existent at the same time, is just as reasonable as to affirm, that the gospel is at once a revelation and a mystery, a thing shewn and a thing hidden. That there are many ambiguous expressions, and many dark sayings, in the gospel; that there are many doctrines, which reason would never have taught, nor is able to comprehend now they are taught, cannot be denied. Nay, the utmost human endeavours have been, and must be always, employed in vain to reduce the intire plan of divine wisdom in the mission of CHRIST, and the redemption of man, to a coherent, intelligible, and reasonable system of doctrines and facts. Is it strange that it should be so? It could not be otherwise. Two of the evangelists recorded, as witnesses, what they saw and heard in this extraordinary conjuncture: and two others  
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what they were told about it. Not the whole indeed; for then "the world could not have contained the books that would have been written;" but as much as was necessary, and even a little more than was strictly so, to account for the establishment of the spiritual kingdom of CHRIST, as it is called improperly enough, and to explain the laws of it, and the conditions of admission into it. If a great prince should arise in any country, make an entire revolution in the constitution of it, reform some, and abolish others, of the ancient laws and customs, and establish a new government on new principles of government, would it not be sufficient for the people to know his right in general, and the measures of their obedience in particular? Would they complain, if some things essential to neither, and scarce relative to the latter, were obscurely mentioned in any of his declarations or constitutions, that they wanted a complete system of the government to which they submitted themselves, and were therefore obliged to supply on their own authority what they had not received on the authority of their legislator. I think they would make no such complaint. Reasonable men, I am sure, would not. To such, the whole would appear plain enough; and they would resolve to believe and obey it in the obvious and literal sense, whilst a few busy, over-curious, and designing politicians might render what was plain, intricate; and two or three dark expressions the subject of perpetual dispute, and irreconcilable division, by

their refinements. Thus the peace of society might be broken, and the very end of government be defeated, not by any want of necessary information, but by an affectation of knowing more than the legislator thought it necessary that they should know. Such as I have represented these politicians in civil government, such have divines and metaphysicians shewn themselves in religion: and it is full as unjust to charge the mischiefs that have followed in one case, on religion, as it would be to charge those that would follow in the other, on government.

THE only way to have prevented such mischiefs as these from arising in the city of God would have been this, that Christians should have adhered closely to the gospel, as it was taught by CHRIST himself; that they should have thought it, as he thought it, sufficient for them; have received implicitly what is plainly revealed in it, and have avoided all dogmatical decisions on things obscure or doubtful. Explanations in all these cases serve only to multiply disputes, and to establish religion on human, instead of divine, authority. This affords a rule invariable as God himself. The other fluctuates as the opinions, and even the interests of men vary. Under one, Christians might have continued united in the same communion, and even members of the same family, friends and brethren. Under the other, it is impossible that this, which is the great object of Christianity, should

should be obtained: and therefore I am willing to believe that they, who had been the immediate disciples of the Saviour, preached his gospel in a spirit of union, in so simple a style, and in so strict and scrupulous a conformity to the revelations he had made, in what form soever the writings of these men have come down to us, through very interpolating hands, that there neither was, nor could be, any division among them, nor any seeds of division sowed by them. He who compares the epistles of JAMES, of PETER and JOHN, such as we have them, with those of PAUL, and all these with the doctrines of the gospel, will be perhaps of this opinion: at least he will have no ground to say of the three first, that they were authors of new gospels; as he will have grounds to say of the last, and as the last does in effect say of himself. He will be of this opinion too the more easily, on account of a very sensible difference in the manner, as well as the matter, of their writings. There is a most remarkable and amiable anecdote to this purpose mentioned by some writers, and for which the authority of JEROM is cited. St. JOHN had been long confined in the island of Pathmos, to which DOMITIAN had banished him, and where it is pretended that he writ the Apocalypse, that strange rhapsody of unintelligible revelations, as they are called most absurdly. It is much more probable, and more for the honor of the evangelist, as well as of Christianity, to believe that they were composed by CERINTHUS, by a vision-

nary of the same name as that of the apostle, or by some other enthusiast. They were not admitted into the canon at Laodicea, nor would having been ever admitted to disgrace it, if JUSTIN, IRENAEUS, ORIGEN, and TERTULLIAN, in whom the love of mystery was a kind of delirium, and after their example several of the other fathers, had not crowded them into the canon by receiving them as canonical. The anecdote I am about to produce will shew how far St. JOHN was, tho' his gospel gave him the title of the theologian, from multiplying and propagating mysteries, and how he retained that character of plainness and simplicity, which he had acquired in the school of his divine master. DOMITIAN dead, and NERVA emperor, the holy evangelist returned to his church at Ephesus, threescore years after the death of JESUS. Not only the gospels, his own among the rest, which it is said that he writ at the desire of his people as soon as he returned to them; but even the epistles were then writ, and the system of Christianity had taken, in most of the churches at least, the form which PAUL had given it. If the good old man, feeble and decrepit, was unable to make long sermons, it appeared that he did not think them very necessary neither; for when he spoke in the public assemblies, the sum of what he said was, "Children, love one another." The people of Ephesus, where PAUL had been, where he boasted that he had fought with beasts after the manner of men, where he

had

had certainly made long and mystical discourses, were disappointed and dissatisfied with the succinct and plain doctrine of their bishop: but when they expostulated with him upon it, they had a very short and decisive answer, "This the Lord commands: and if you do this, it is sufficient." He spoke to men who believed already in Jesus the Messiah, and in all that he had just before recorded in the gospel he published at their request, after his return from Pathmos. Whatever others might think, he thought that the gospel wanted no further explanations, nor extensions; and contented himself therefore to recall to their memory, on every occasion, that fundamental article of the law of nature, and the law of the gospel, universal benevolence.

THE character of St. JOHN was not that of St. PAUL. One had been formed in the bosom of JESUS; called to be a disciple, and commissioned to be an apostle, instructed by the doctrine and example of his master. He had, like PETER and the rest, no other science, and what that was the four evangelists tell us. PAUL, on the contrary, had been educated in the schools of the law, such as the law was become in those days, when oral tradition, cabalistical mysteries, and scraps of pythagorician, platonic, and even stoic, doctrines had been blended with it, and composed the most extravagant systems of philosophy and religion. The masters of all this learning were the Pharisees, whose sect began prob-

bably two hundred years before CHRIST, and was in the highest reputation when he came into the world. Of this sect was PAUL; and he continued in it till he was about forty years old, “profiting in the religion of the Jews above  
 “many of his equals — exceedingly zealous of  
 “the traditions of his fathers—and persecuting  
 “the church of God \*.” After this, he, who had resisted so many miracles, was converted by a miracle, which he and his amanuensis LUKE have related. He was called by God himself in a great light, which was always understood to denote some divine presence, to be an apostle, a chosen vessel, replenished with gifts of the Holy Ghost, and overflowing with grace. His peculiar destination was to preach CHRIST, whom God had revealed in him, among the heathen: and this he began to do immediately, for being made an apostle by a distinct commission from the rest, he “conferred not with flesh and blood,  
 “nor went up to Jerusalem to them which were  
 “apostles before him,” but preached as soon as his eyes were opened, as he had received the imposition of hands, and as he had been baptized, by virtue of a particular inspiration, that gospel, of which he speaks to the Galatians with so much confidence, that he pronounces every one, who should preach any thing different from it, himself, an angel from heaven, and therefore most certainly even the other apostles, accursed. It was not till three years after his jour-

\* Epist. to the Galatians, chap. i.

ney into Arabia, and his return to Damascus, that he went to Jerusalem, where he communicated privately to them, which were of reputation, the gospel he preached to the Gentiles; for he might want their approbation, tho' he did not want their information nor advice: and this he obtained so far, that they gave him and BARNABAS the right hand of fellowship; that these two should preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and they, that is, the other apostles, to the children of Israel.

THIS short deduction of facts, taken from St. PAUL's own account of himself, and in which he assured the Galatians before God that he lied not, may serve to introduce an observation touched upon already, and more easily made than explained. In the last chapter of his epistle to the Romans, he calls the gospel he preached, my gospel; "which expression he cannot be supposed to have used, says Mr. LOCKE in his note on the passage very justly, unless he knew that what he preached had something in it, that distinguished it from what was preached by others." But what that was we are left by this able commentator to seek. It was not plainly, what he says it was plainly, "the mystery of God's purpose of taking in the Gentiles to be his people—and without subjecting them to circumcision, or the law of MOSES." If this mystery, so inconsistent with the declarations and practice of JESUS, was revealed to PAUL, it was revealed to the

apostles too, since they preached and published the glad tidings of salvation indifferently to Jews and Gentiles; in doing which, had this mystery been revealed to him exclusively of them, they would have been apostles of PAUL in this instance, rather than of CHRIST. If the exemption of the Gentile converts from circumcision, and other observances of the mosaical law, was the mystery, the mystery was explained by the decree of the council of Jerusalem; by which nothing more was required of the Gentiles, than to “abstain from idolatry, or meats offered to “idols, from fornication, and from blood.” St. PAUL assumed indeed, that not only the vocation of the Gentiles, but this exemption in favor of them and of the Jews too, were mysteries revealed particularly to him. It is evident however, that the other apostles and the elders looked on it as no mystery at all, and that they treated it as a matter of discipline: so that a question may arise, whether St. PAUL was, what the pope pretends to be, above the council, or the council above him. The apostles had given no directions to insist, that the Gentiles should, or should not, submit to circumcision, and to the yokes of the law, which St. PETER scruples not to say, in his speech on that occasion, were so heavy, that “neither they nor their fathers were “able to bear them\*.” In a word, by the opinion St. JAMES delivered, and by the whole tenor of the decree, it is manifest, that the mis-

\* Acts, chap. xv.



taken zeal for the law, which some of the Jews retained after their conversion, and perhaps the immoderate zeal of St. PAUL for an immediate and total abolition of it, had given rise to this dispute, and that it was determined not as a point on which the divine purpose had been revealed to PAUL, or any one else, but, according to what has been just now said, as a point of discipline left to the discretion of the apostles and elders, whose sole regard was to prevent any schism in a church hardly yet formed, and who for that reason, whilst they indulged the Jews in circumcision and other ritual observances of their law, exempted the Gentiles from the far greatest and heaviest part of them.

BUT there is something more to be observed. If the purpose of God was to take the Gentiles to be his people under the Messiah in this manner; if their abstaining from Jewish rites and ceremonies was a positive law of God under the new covenant, as the abstaining from idolatry was both under the new and under the old, how came it to pass, that the Messiah himself gave no instruction about it to his apostles, when he sent them to preach his gospel to all nations, and, as we may say, to people his kingdom, which they did chiefly out of the Gentile world? Why was the revelation of this important mystery, so necessary to be published at the very first publication of the gospel, if it was the eternal purpose of God, or else not necessary at all, reserved for St. PAUL, who was then a persecutor, not a preacher,

of the gospel, and whose apostleship did not begin before the conversions? Shall we say that this eternal purpose of the Father was unknown to the Son? We shall blaspheme if we do. Shall we say that it was known to him, but that he neglected to communicate it to the first preachers of his gospel, and gave them imperfect instructions? The profanation will be little less. These questions, and some others of the same kind, will not be easily answered, unless it be by men who are never at a loss to account for the absurdities that they impute to the divine conduct, by supposing it directed according to such partialities as are proportioned to the lowness of their minds. But the pertness, not to say the impudence, of these men deserving no regard, we must seek another solution of the difficulty, and endeavour to find what it was that distinguished St. PAUL in this respect from the other apostles, and gave him a reason for calling the gospel he preached his own gospel.

SOME solution of this sort may occur to us, perhaps, if we reflect on what was mentioned above concerning the difference between the manner in which St. PAUL preached the gospel, and that of the other apostles; which difference marks very strongly the different schools wherein they had been instructed, and had formed the habits that characterised them, the school of CHRIST and the school of GAMALIEL. From one of these the apostles had brought great modesty and gentleness of temper, a short, familiar, and simple style,  
like

like that of their Lord and master. From the other St. PAUL carried into the apostleship, with a great stock of Jewish learning, a great deal of that assuming air which is apt to accompany much learning, or the opinion of it : and accordingly we find him obliged more than once in his epistles to excuse his boasting, and the value he set on himself, by such humble expressions, as a man, who had not been full of the Holy Ghost, might, in his case, have taken a pride in using. He carried with him likewise, from the pharisaical schools, a great profusion of words, and of involved unconnected discourse, even on those subjects which required to be the most clearly and distinctly developed, if they were to be insisted upon at all, and not to be passed over in silence rather, or touched very transiently, as they had been by the other apostles. The other apostles were all evangelists, that is, they were publishers of the glad tidings of salvation : they declared to the world that the kingdom of the Messiah, that is, the spiritual kingdom, was begun ; and they taught men the indispensable conditions of belief and practice, in order to be admitted into it. Farther than was necessary to this purpose they did not affect to carry their doctrines. They meant to convince, not to perplex, the minds of men. They knew that by doing the last they should obstruct the first ; or should give great advantage to the false doctors that were arisen, and were to arise, to corrupt Christianity. St. PAUL was a loose para-

paraphraſer, a cabaliſtical commentator, as much at leaſt as any ancient or modern rabbin; and tho' his goſpel was, in the fundamental principles of it, the ſame as theirs, yet he mingled it up with ſo much of his own theology, that he might not improperly, and in one ſenſe, call it his own, and that we may call him the father of artificial theology. Not content to reveal myſterious truths in propoſitions whoſe terms were intelligible, tho' the manner of being of theſe truths was ſtill a myſtery (which is no objection to the belief of any thing contained in a revelation once proved to be divine) he amplified them, deſcanted upon them, opened the whole economy of divine wiſdom from ADAM to CHRIST, and accounted for the ſeveral diſpenſations of God to man. The original goſpel, ſuch as the other apoſtles preached it, was a plain ſyſtem of belief and practice, fitted for all times, and proportioned to all underſtandings. St. PAUL's goſpel, if it may be ſaid to be fitted as much as the others for all times, of which I doubt, cannot be ſaid to be proportioned to all underſtandings. It is evidently not ſo to the underſtandings of the deepeſt divines, and the moſt ſubtile metaphyſicians; ſince they have been wrangling about it from that time to this, and have eſtabliſhed the moſt oppoſite doctrines on the ſame texts, to the breach of all charity, and the diſturbance of the Chriſtian world \*.

\* I will mention a little more fully, in this note, what I omitted in the text. All that is ſaid there, is ſaid relatively to

It may be said that some passages in the four gospels, and even some expressions of CHRIST recorded in them, have been liable to various interpretations

to received interpretations and opinions, such as Mr. LOCKE would have admitted, and were therefore proper to be followed in reasoning against him. But if I am to speak my own opinion; the matter in question may be decided more shortly, and on the whole more consistently. St. PAUL then might very well talk of his gospel, even in contradistinction to that of CHRIST; since he taught several doctrines which had no foundation in that of CHRIST, and others, as I have said, that were directly repugnant both to the word and example of the Messiah. CHRIST professed Judaism, and declared himself sent to the Jews alone, and not even to the Samaritans, so positively, that when he commissioned his apostles, he may be, and to make him consistent, ought to be understood to have meant no more, than to send them to the Jews dispersed in all nations. St. PAUL, on the contrary, instead of grafting Christianity on Judaism, insisted on an entire abolition of the latter; to which, however, he had conformed most hypocritically on more occasions than one; and his doctrine became, not at once, but in time, the doctrine of the Christian church. This may appear strange to those who read, without a free consideration of what they read: and it will appear still more strange to them to find a Pagan emperor, and a great enemy both of Jews and Christians, introduced as an instrument appointed by God to accomplish his secret designs in confirming the doctrine St. PAUL's gospel; and yet ADRIAN is so introduced by SULPICIUS SEVERUS; for he says, that the Christian church at Jerusalem having had till that time none but Jews in the episcopal chair, and the greatest part of the faithful there believing in JESUS CHRIST without departing from the

interpretations, and have produced such disputes and contests as these which I ascribe to the writings of St. PAUL. But altho' this be undoubtedly true, the difference between the original gospel, and that of St. PAUL, is very real, and very manifest. One is a plain and clear system of religion, with here and there a doubtful phrase that casts no obscurity on the rest. The other is an intricate and dark system, with here and there an intelligible phrase that casts no light on the rest, but is rather lost in the gloom of the whole. By faith I may believe, but by faith I cannot understand. A proposition, the terms of which are unintelligible, is an absolute mystery: to say that we are bound to believe mysteries in this sense, is itself nonsense; to say we do believe them, is a lie. But a proposition, the terms of which are intelligible, may be an object of faith, tho' we understand by it nothing more than the terms; when it is supported, as was said above, by divine authority, nay often when it is supported only by human. A man, upon whose knowledge and sincerity I ought to depend, reveals to me a few mathematical truths, which, in certain circumstances, it is necessary I should know, and troubles men either with the demonstrations, which I might not be able to comprehend, nor

the legal ceremonies, that edict of ADRIAN, which hindered Jews from going to Jerusalem, was of great use to Christianity: by which we must understand the Christianity of St. PAUL's gospel, and not that of CHRIST's.

with

with many corollaries to be drawn from them, which I do not want. Another, the scholar of the first, and of less authority than his master, brings me a paper filled with diagrams, and letters, and figures, which he assures me, contains demonstrations of the former truths, and explanations of several corollaries deducible from them. I understand neither. Those whom I consult appear to understand them as little as myself, by their disputes about the meaning of them. The truths, which were clear and sufficient for me in simple propositions, as I received them first, are involved in mystery ; and then incoherent, figurative discourse thickens the cloud.

LET any man read the epistles we have of this apostle's writing, after he has read the gospels ; let him read the former, as he would read any other books of philosophy or theology ; let him call in Mr. LOCKE to his assistance, who has succeeded better, perhaps, than any other expositor, by happier conjectures, and no greater license of paraphrase, in giving an air of coherence, consistency, and rationality to these epistles, and in making them intelligible: such a man will not be able, after all his pains, to shew any one mystery that is left unfolded in the concise language of the gospel taught by CHRIST and his apostles, that has been rendered less mysterious by the prolixity of St. PAUL. St. PAUL rather doubles mystery than simplifies it, if I may say so ; and adds every where a mystery of words to  
a mystery

a mystery of things. That they, who have, since his time, and after his example, grafted theology on revelation, extended the doctrines of it, explained and applied the prophecies, types, and figures, invented new ones of every sort, and raised a variety of discord and systems on the same simple and uniform plan, should be for the most part very little intelligible, is not wonderful. He, who has clear and distinct ideas in his mind, will write clearly and distinctly: and the author who puzzles an attentive reader is first puzzled himself, how common soever it be, in the science we speak of here particularly, to see those admired the most who are the least understood. That has been the case of these men. They have pretended to instruct others on subjects on which it was impossible they should have clear and distinct ideas, or indeed any ideas at all. But that St. PAUL should write confusedly and unintelligibly, he who was illuminated by the Holy Ghost, that he might enlighten the Gentiles, and he who received all he taught by immediate revelation, must be always a problem not easy to resolve. “He was, it is said, a man of quick thought and warm temper—versed in the writings of the Old testament, full of the doctrines of the New—so that one may consider him, when he was writing, as beset with a crowd of thoughts, all striving for utterance\*.” But are we not to consider him too, when he was writing, as a

\* LOCKE’S preface to his Paraphrase, &c.



man under the influence of actual inspiration? And was not divine inspiration sufficient to keep him from falling into those faults, want of order and perspicuity, into which none but the meanest of uninspired writers are apt to fall? Mr. LOCKE should have thought so, since St. PAUL says, that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets †:” and he in his Paraphrase, that “Christians, however filled with the Holy Ghost — are not hurried away by any compulsion.” A neglect of eloquence, and the ornaments of speech, became an apostle. But it is hard to discern how a neglect of order and perspicuity should be apostolical, since the design of such a mission is to instruct and to convince.

## S E C T. X.

**A**FTER saying so much of the unintelligibility of PAUL’s gospel, truth authorises me to add, that where it is intelligible it is often absurd, or profane, or trifling. Is not the doctrine of passive obedience, which he teaches, most intelligibly absurd? Is not that of absolute predestination most intelligibly profane? Is not one of them repugnant to common sense? Is not the other as repugnant to all the ideas of God’s moral perfections? Would not either of them be sufficient to shake the credit even of CHRIST’s gospel, if they were contained in it?

† 1 Cor. c. xiv.

BUT it remains that I give an instance of the most intelligible trifling that we find in this gospel: and this instance will lead us to observe in what manner Christianity was taught and propagated by the first converts to it in their public assemblies, and how easily extensions of it, or engraftments on it, might be made. We hear much of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit that were bestowed on these converts, such as prophesying, working miracles, and speaking in unknown tongues; which are enumerated, with several others, by St. PAUL in the twelfth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthian profelytes. The last of these gifts belonged more properly to those who were designed to be missionaries of the gospel, that they might be able to convert unbelievers more effectually in their dispersion over different countries. But where churches were established, St. PAUL\* prefers the use of the language of the place, dislikes the affectation of using any other, and indulges it only when there is an interpreter at hand. The gift of prophecy, by which he intends not only prediction, but singing of psalms, and teaching the doctrines of religion in their public assemblies, is that to which he assigns the first place. Now this gift every one might exercise, even the women. They are ordered, indeed, by some passages, to keep silence in the churches†, and if they will know any thing, to ask their husbands at home: and yet it is plain,

\* 1 Cor. c. xiv.

† 1 Cor. c. xiv.

by other passages of the same epistle\*, that they were allowed to prophesy, as it is called, and that they did so before the congregations. This apparent contradiction is reconciled by assuming, that tho' they were not on every ordinary occasion to act the part of teachers and instructors, yet they were not debarred from it, when by any extraordinary motion and impulse of the Spirit they were determined to exercise this function. The only dispute was, whether they should exercise it covered or uncovered : and this material point was decided by St. PAUL. He let the Corinthians, among whom this dispute had arisen, know, " that the head of every man is CHRIST, " and the head of the woman is the man, and the " head of CHRIST is God : " from whence he concludes that a man, " who is the image and " glory of God—having his head covered, disho- " noreth his head ; " but that a woman, who " is " the glory of the man, with her head unco- " vered, dishonoreth her head ; for that is all " one as if she were shaven † . " This argumen- tation may not appear very conclusive, nor in- deed very intelligible, to us ; but it was both, I doubt not, to the Corinthians : and in all cases it serves to shew that both sexes had their reve- lations, and a right to publish them.

THE apostle ‡ proceeds afterwards to give directions for keeping better order in the public assemblies, which were held with great confusion,

\* 1 Cor. xi. † Ibid. ‡ 1 Cor. chap. xiv.

whilst every one was impatient to shew his gifts, and they could not stay to do it one by one. Even these directions left room for some confusion still. Two or three might prophesy at the same meeting, one after another, and the rest of the congregation were to judge; which not only begat debate, but caused interruptions, that usually beget altercation. That this must have happened we may assure ourselves, since by one of the rules St. PAUL prescribes, if any thing was revealed to a sinner by, the speaker was to hold his peace. SIMON the magician would have bought the power of bestowing the gifts of the Holy Ghost by the imposition of his hands, as he saw them bestowed by PETER and JOHN; and SIMON had embraced Christianity, and had been baptised. In an age, therefore, when a communication of these gifts was esteemed so common and so easily given, it could not but be, that multitudes thought they had some or more of these gifts, and especially that of prophesying; and that as some imagined piously they had inspirations when they had them not, so others, even this magician, tho' the apostles had rejected his offer, affected impiously to have them. It could not be hard to pass false revelations on a world, on whom it was so easy to pass false miracles; which this very SIMON, and other supposed magicians, and real impostors did very frequently.

THIS opinion of divine illuminations and revelations

velations being once established, an abstruse theology being once grafted on the plain doctrines which the gospel taught, and an example being set of extending the system beyond it's native simplicity, by collecting passages here and there, and by comparing and applying them in a cabalistical manner, even according to the sound very often, rather than the import of the words; the natural consequences did not fail to follow among the illiterate and superstitious Jews and Gentiles, who were the first converts to Christianity. I need not stay to point out these consequences. History ancient and modern does that sufficiently, and even our own experience in some degree. Every man who has heard of the language and behaviour of men possessed with fanaticism, may point them out to himself. But enthusiasm, superstition, and the abuse of religion were not confined to the most illiterate. A multitude of new doctors arose, all of whom pretended to have divine knowledge, and some to be divine persons. A multitude of doctors formed a multitude of sects: the followers of SIMON the magician, as he was thought by those who were no conjurers themselves, the disciples of CARPOCRAS and of CERINTHUS, of CERDON, MARCION, and, soon after these, of MANES, the Nicholaites, the Valentinians, and many others; for they grew up apace.

THESE men had the Old Testament and several gospels and several apostolical epistles before  
A 2 2 them,

them, for no canon of scripture was yet settled, nor till more than three centuries afterwards; tho' it may seem not a little extraordinary that this should have been neglected, whilst the tradition, that could alone establish the authenticity of these writings, was fresh enough to be itself authentic. The writings, however, that passed all for authentic in some or other of the Christian churches, these men had. Nay, some of them had been hearers of the apostles, and had begun to dogmatise at the same time. Neither they nor their successors had the same spirit. But they assumed the same liberty, and by adding allegory to allegory, type to type, mystery to mystery, and one arbitrary interpretation to another, Christianity became a confused chaos of theology. Such it continued long, and such it is, in some degree, even now: for tho' many of the systems that were formed out of it, and that were coeval with it, wore out in the space of three or four centuries, many others sprung up from the same seeds, and were nursed into maturity and strength by the same culture. Nay, some of the same seeds produce now and then, even at this day, and in our own country, a feeble weed or two in the vineyard of the Lord. Some of the churches, which were established by the apostles or their immediate successors, and which maintained a charitable correspondence together, might maintain likewise, for aught we know, with greater purity of manners, a greater purity of doctrine. But we must not believe,

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on the first head, that they who dissented from them, and were therefore called heretics by them, fell into such abominations as have been represented by IRENAEUS, TERTULLIAN, EPIPHANIUS, and other fathers, who were very choleric, very foul-mouthed, and often guilty of scandalous exaggeration. A charge that may be brought with the more confidence, since it is supported by their own writings that are extant, and by men of the greatest authority in ecclesiastical literature; and since it can be neither denied, evaded, nor excused by those who are the least willing to own it. As we must not believe all that the fathers advance on this head, so must we not believe on the other, as many good people seem to do, that the primitive Christians had an uniform plan of theology, explained as we explain it, and understood as we understand it. The system swelled insensibly faster among some, more slowly among others: and they seemed to agree much better than they did in reality, as it appeared when criticism came in fashion, and they were obliged to express themselves with more precision concerning the principal articles of their faith.

## S E C T. XI.

**A**LL these sects may be comprehended under the general name of gnostics, or learned and illuminated. At first they affected to have it thought, that they alone were both one and the

A a 3 other,

other, and to despise such as could not discover all they pretended to discover of the hidden sense of the scriptures, and of the mysteries of Christianity. But the orthodox grew, in time, as much gnostics as others : and we see that CLEMENT of Alexandria \* thought it necessary to be so, in order to be truly religious. Illumination, and the gifts of the Spirit, served to establish this Christianity : but philosophy, and the sciences, were of use to confirm and improve it. No ages nor countries could be more prepared to adopt every theological and metaphysical notion, even the most extravagant and least intelligible, than those wherein the Christian religion was first published and propagated. Egypt, and the eastern kingdoms, had been famous schools of a reputed divine philosophy. PYTHAGORAS had gone to them all. PLATO had gone to the former only. But what he had not acquired at the first hand, from the gymnosophists, the followers of ZOROASTER, the magi, and other oriental masters, he acquired at the second, by conversing with the italic philosophers, and by a study of their writings. He says somewhere, that the Greeks improved and mended all they borrowed from the barbarians ; which I am far from believing to be true. But if PYTHAGORAS and he carried any science farther than their masters, I incline to think it was the most phantastic.

SINCE the works of PLATO are in our hands,

\* Strom. lib. vii.



we may speak of him and his theology with more assurance, than of those who went before him, or of their doctrines. Those of ORPHEUS, or those that passed under such a name in ancient Greece, where chiefly mythological ; those of PYTHAGORAS, symbolical ; and those of PLATO, metaphysical, with a mixture of the other two. Nothing could be more proper, nor effectual, to promote phantastical knowledge, than a method of philosophising by fables, symbols, and almost a perpetual allegory. But the founder of the academy did more. He poisoned the very source of all real knowledge, by inducing men to believe, that their minds are capable of abstracting, as no human mind can abstract, and of acquiring ideas, that it is impossible any human mind should perceive. He pretended to raise a mystic ladder, on which we might not only clamber up by dint of meditation to a region of pure intellect, wherein alone is knowledge, and leave sensible objects behind us, concerning which nothing better than opinion is to be had ; but find at the head of it incorporeal essences, immaterial forms, spiritual beings, and perhaps the Logos or second god : as the supreme God is supposed to have been at the head of the ladder JACOB saw in his dream. Angels went up and down one : philosophers were to go up and down the other.

THIS philosopher dealt little in physics ; and he was in the right to neglect them. Me-

taphysics served his purpose better. Hypotheses of the former kind must be founded in some real knowledge : how high soever the top of the ladder reaches, the foot must stand firm on the earth. But hypotheses of the other kind are more easy to be framed, and less easy to be controlled. Thus, for instance, an intellectual world being once assumed, wherein the ideas, the forms, the patterns of all that exist in the sensible world reside, it was easy to people it with numberless intellectual, that is, spiritual, that is, immaterial, that is, simple beings without extension or solidity, that is, beings of which these refiners had negative, but no positive ideas. They were at liberty afterwards to suppose whatever relations they pleased between these beings, and between them and men. Metaphysical hypotheses, in short, are not content to account for what may be by what is, nor to improve science according to the conditions of our nature, by raising probability on the foundations of certainty : but the makers of them affect to range in the immense void of possibility, with little or no regard to actuality ; and begin very often, as well as end, in supposition. Not only their systems are hypothetical, but the first principles of them, and the very ideas and notions which compose them, are hypothetical too.

SUCH a philosopher, such a teacher of imaginary and phantastic knowledge, PLATO was. Notwithstanding which, or for which reason

rather, he grew soon into great vogue in Greece, and in those countries where Grecian literature was propagated after the expedition of ALEXANDER. This philosophy could not fail to be well received in those countries, from the schools of which it had been derived originally : and it flourished accordingly, and triumphed, as it were, over all others in some parts of Asia, and in Egypt, whilst it made it's way into Italy, and was propagated westward through the Roman empire. The Jews of Palestine, and they who lived under the protection of the PTOLEMIES, had taken a strong tincture of heathen philosophy, and of this in particular. The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, of a future state of rewards and punishments, and even that of a metempsychosis, were adopted by the learned amongst them; tho' they were rejected by those who adhered to the letter of the law : for MOSES had taught nothing of this kind. If any such hints are contained in other books of their scriptures, it is impossible to say when, or by whom those books were written, with the least assurance, notwithstanding all the dogmatical impertinence of scholars : whereas we know, that all their sacred writings were compiled after their captivity, and that the canon of them was long in settling. It is possible, therefore, and even evident, that if they knew any thing of these doctrines, which had not been transmitted to them by MOSES, before their acquaintance with the Greek philosophy, they must have learned it from the nations

tions among whom they had been mixed, and from whom the Greeks had learned the same, from the Chaldeans, and even from the Egyptians, with whom they had commerce, and in whose country many of them found a refuge in the desolation of their own by the Babylonians. But if they had so learned it, they had learned it very darkly ; for there is no instance that shews they understood, received, or taught these doctrines, till long after their first acquaintance with the Greeks.

BUT, be all this as it will, it is certain that platonism was an established philosophy among the Jews before the coming of CHRIST, and that it was much more so among the Christians afterwards. It is astonishing to consider how fond the Christians were, in the first ages of this church, to believe, and to make others believe, that all the mysteries of their religion had been revealed by the writings of Pagan philosophers, many centuries before they were so by the preaching of CHRIST and his apostles : as if the latter could want, or the former give, any additional authority. It was to promote this opinion, that so many books were forged under the names of MERCURIUS TRISMEGISTUS, of HYSTASPES, of the Sybils, and perhaps of others. These forgeries, indeed, were so gross, that they might be well suspected even at the time they were published. Their credit, however, was maintained till they had had in some degree the effect they were

were designed to have. When they could have this effect in any degree no longer, they were rejected, and even condemned. There was the less need of them for the absurd purposes to which they were applied, because the writings of PLATO \*, writings indisputably his, were public ; and because his works alone, wherein was mingled much of the Pythagorean and other ancient theology, formed an ample and sufficient repertory of theological fables and symbols, and of metaphysical mysteries. They, who have employed themselves from those days to ours in raising systems of divinity on the gospel, and imposing their own inventions by pretending the authority of it, have contented themselves accordingly with the assistance of PLATO and ARISTOTLE ; of the master for sublimity of matter ; of the scholar for subtilty of form.

If the absurdity of those, who have gone about to explain, to confirm, and even to improve, Christianity by the doctrines and authority of Paganism, be, as it is surely, very astonishing ; we must confess, that it is still more astonishing to observe the strange conformity between Platonism and genuine Christianity itself, such as it is taught in the original gospel. We need not stand to compare them here: particular instances of conformity will occur often enough.

\* “ Res enim et verba scholam PLATONIS sapiunt, iis “ exceptis, quae miscet e libris divinis.” CASAUB. speaking of one of these books, in his *Exercit.*

In general, the Platonic and Christian systems have a very near resemblance, "*qualis decet esse*" "*fororum*:" and several of the fathers, as well as modern divines, have endeavoured with all their might, by forced constructions, and sometimes by no very faithful extracts, to make this resemblance appear still greater. Ridiculous endeavours, no doubt; since they give unbelievers occasion to say, that if the doctrines are the same, they must have been deduced from the same principle; and to ask what that principle was, whether reason or revelation? If we say it was reason; they will reply, that reason could not discover what reason cannot comprehend when it is discovered. A mystery may be an object of faith to him, to whom it is communicated in an intelligible proposition. But it must be an object of knowledge in him who communicates it, and requires an assent to it on his own authority, that is, on a confidence that he knows it to be true, and that it is no mystery to him. If we say it was revelation; they will reply, that PLATO then must have been illuminated by the Holy Ghost; that he must have been the precursor of the Saviour, as some Platonic bigots have ventured, with a very little softening to the term, to call him; and that he must have been a precursor too of more importance than St. JOHN. St. JOHN instituted a baptism of repentance; and much has been said by ancient and modern doctors in theology to state the difference between this baptism and that of

CHRIST;

CHRIST; baptism with water\*, and baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire†. These terms, as dark as they are, shew however a manifest difference: and there can be no doubt that the baptism of JESUS was much more effectual than the baptism of JOHN: as that of JOHN was effectual to higher purposes than that of the Jews. But PLATO, instead of calling on men in general to repent, and of instituting one mystical ceremony, anticipated the gospel on so many principal articles of belief and practice, that, as some divines say, the gospel was a republication of the law of nature, the unbelievers will say it was a republication of the theology of PLATO. They will argue a fortiori, that since the republication of these mysteries was made by divine revelation, the publication of them must have been of necessity made by the same means: and they will conclude, perhaps, by asking with a sneer, whether a man, whose passion for courtesans, and handsome boys, inspired him to write so many lewd verses, was likely to be inspired by the Holy Ghost?

SUCH considerations as these are more than sufficient to explode the impertinent and profane notion, that PLATO was inspired immediately, or that he had, in any lower degree metaphysicians can imagine, such a share of divine illumination as enabled him to discover, in part at

\* In aqua in poenitentiam.

† In Spiritu sancto, et igni. MAT. cap. iii.

least, those mysterious truths that were not to be fully revealed till the Messiah came. But the question returns, how came he to discover them, even in part, near four centuries before the Messiah did come? or how came they to make a part of that Pagan theology from which he took them? A plain answer may be made to these questions: and I think there is no other that can be reconciled to common sense. I have hinted at it already: but it requires to be more explained. All we can know of the divine nature, of the attributes, providence, and will of God, must be communicated to us by his word, or collected by us from his works. The Heathen philosophers had not his word, and they corrupted all the knowledge they acquired from his works by their manner of philosophising. They not only hastened too rashly from particular to general knowledge, and from a few imperfect observations of the phaenomena, to the most extensive hypotheses; but they raised hypotheses independently of the observations they made, or might have made; and then reasoned on these hypotheses as from certain principles of knowledge: so that the little real knowledge they acquired a posteriori was controlled by that which they fancied that they acquired a priori; and thus the whole mass of the first philosophy was corrupted. They discovered, in his works, a first intelligent cause of all things, a Being of infinite power and wisdom, whose providence is over all his creatures, and whose will, relatively  
to



to man, is manifested in the whole human system. Here was abundant matter of real knowledge. Thus far the Supreme Being lets himself down, if I may use such an expression, within the verge of human comprehension, and of human alone, as far as we can judge of the animal world about us. Beyond this fixed point we can have no real ideas, and therefore no real knowledge. All that we may imagine we have, is, and must be, phantastical. We are no more able to acquire knowledge beyond, than other animals up to, this point: and the divine nature, the manner of being, the moral attributes of God, the general system of his providence, are as inscrutable to man as to them. His will too, according to which they are determined by natural instinct, is as inscrutable to us, as to them, beyond the bounds of natural revelation, unless a supernatural revelation communicate farther knowledge: which it did not to these philosophers.

WHAT now was their proceeding? did they stop where the means of knowledge stop? Not at all. Where the system ended, the hypothesis began; and with this difference between these and all other hypotheses, that those which are made in physics are made on subjects on which we have much knowledge, and means in our power of acquiring more; whereas hypotheses in theology are made on a subject we know little of, and have not the means of knowing more. Error in the former may be corrected by improve-

ment of knowledge : error in the latter cannot, because there can be no improvement beyond the point where such hypotheses begin. It has been observed in these essays, and more than once, perhaps, that there are philosophers who boast much of the power which the human mind has of ranging far and wide in the regions of possibility, and of perceiving what may be, as well as what is ; from whence they draw very foolish conclusions in favor of human understanding. Now that the mind of man has such a power, we know most consciously. But we know, or may know too as consciously, that the exercise of this power is dangerous ; and that he, who does not use it under a strict control of judgment on imagination, will be sure to render his conduct and his science both phantastical. PLATO, like all the divines of Paganism, was far from preserving such a control. No man had more imagination ; no man controlled it less.

It would be easy to conceive, if we had not his works before us, that such extravagant methods of philosophising must have produced the most extravagant opinions ; and he who reads these works, like a man in his senses, will be tempted to think, on many occasions, that the author was not so. I say on many occasions ; for on some it is certain, that he writes like a very pious and rational theist and moralist. But on the whole, his writings are pieces of patch-work ; and there are few of them that  
do

do not abound in false sublime and low images, in things above comprehension, in things below notice, in the brightest truths, and the foulest errors: and, to come to the present purpose, some of them abound in notions that are agreeable to the Christian system, and in others that are repugnant to it; or that, bearing an appearance of likeness, nay of sameness, are much more proper to promote superstition and enthusiasm, as in fact they did, than true religion. These considerations, every one of which may be justified by the most famous of his dialogues, gave occasion, perhaps, to some difference that arose in the reception of Platonism by the Christian fathers. St. CHRYSOSTOM, it is said, declaimed against it: and I remember a passage in TERTULLIAN \*, wherein he complains that the seeds of heresies were scattered in PLATO's books of the republic, and in his doctrine of ideas, which he calls "haeretica idearum sacramenta †." The greatest fathers of the church, however, tho' they differed in other things, agreed in admiring PLATO; and borrowed much of their theology from him. Such were JUSTIN, ORIGEN, JEROM, AUSTIN, to quote no others; and the first the most remarkably. But how venerable soever their names may be, their conduct was in this respect extremely absurd, injurious to the gospel, and derogatory to the authority of it, as will appear undeniably

\* De anima. † — In ideis Platonis gnosticorum haeretica semina relucere.

by the reflections I had in view when I said that a plain answer might be made to those, who should ask how the mysterious truths of the gospel could be known, without divine illumination, to PLATO.

## S E C T. XII.

**T**HE reflections I meant are these. What the Christians borrowed from PLATO's works was not contained in the gospel, or it was contained in it. If no such thing was contained in it, the presumption of those was inexcusable, who added a single doctrine to the Christian system, or even an explanation of a doctrine, on the faith of an heathen philosopher, whose theism, tho' purer than that of others, had still a tang of superstition, and even of polytheism. With respect to God, this presumption was a profanation: with respect to man, it was a fraud. The Christians who were guilty of it imposed, on themselves, or, if not on themselves, on others as far as their authority extended, the word of PLATO for the word of God. If the things they borrowed were contained in the gospel, they had no reason whatever for borrowing; or this must have been their reason, they must have thought the authority of PLATO necessary to confirm that of CHRIST, or reason necessary to render complete what revelation taught imperfectly. The first is a blasphemous, and the second a silly, thought. Reason is necessary and sufficient to  
establish

establiſh revelation, as it has been ſhewed above. But when the truth of a revelation is eſtabliſhed, we are to believe implicitly; the uſe of reaſon ceaſes, her interpoſition grows impertinent, and nothing can be more ſo than the affectation of ancient and modern divines, to baniſh her out of her province, or to appeal to her very weakly in it: whiſt they introduce her into another, and would be thought to reſt upon her where ſhe has nothing to do. Whenever they do this, they go out of their ſtrength: and reaſon, improperly uſed, becomes a much better weapon of offence in the hands of their enemies, than of defence in theirs; as the writings of many eminent divines may demonſtrate.

If reaſon now be ſo ill employed about myſteries that are propoſed, ſhe is ſtill leſs fit, and leſs likely, to propoſe them. MONTAGNE would ſay, they are not her game. The object of reaſon is truth, intelligible, attainable truth: and if ſhe goes at any time, in purſuit of it, into that well where it lies concealed, as EMPEDOCLES, DEMOCRITUS, and the reſt of the ancient philoſophers complained ſo loudly, ſhe never plunges ſo far into the dark, as to be unable to diſtinguiſh it from error. Divine myſteries ſhe receives implicitly, but ſhe advances none of her own under that title: and a reaſonable man, and a myſtic man, ſeem two diſtinct ſpecies. All myſteries, that are not communicated expreſsly by revelation, are produced by me-

taphysical delirium and religious enthusiasm ; to both of which men of the brightest genius have been often transported. SENECA declares a man, who does not rise above humanity, contemptible\*. Many have thought they did so, and, sober on all other subjects, have been stark mad on these ; for there is a madness quoad hoc, if I may say so : and neither you nor I could be at a loss to cite several, and some living, examples of it. But there is too a degree of affectation sometimes in this apparent madness, employed for different purposes. The metaphysical delirium may be kept up by a reputation, which singularity alone is often sufficient to acquire ; and much more by an opinion of making new discoveries in the intellectual world. This affectation, sustained by his own warm imagination, and by those of his Egyptian and Pythagorean masters, possessed PLATO very strongly, and answered very effectually his purpose in the acquisition of fame. He knew the people with whom he had to do ; he knew that no mythology was too gross, no pretended abstractions too whimsical, for them : and nothing can shew so much either how he had turned their heads, or how easily heads were turned by the marvellous in those days, as the general opinion that prevailed of his divine birth. APOLLO appeared to ARISTO his father, and forbade him to enjoy his wife during the space of ten months ;

\* O quam contempta res est homo, nisi supra humana se crexerit !

which

which was a very unnecessary precaution, if the poor man had often tried and never could; and if PERICTIONE was a virgin when the same god appeared to her in a vision, and she conceived. Thus PLATO was begot to be a physician of souls, as AESCULAPIUS had been to be a physician of bodies.

PLATO might safely give a loose to all the extravagance of his imagination in such an age, and be assured that the wildest hypotheses would pass for systems of sublime knowledge, and that the doctrines the least understood would be the most admired. He improved this advantage to the utmost: and it happened, as it might, without inspiration or miracle, that in his rambling speculations about the divine and spiritual nature, about the immortality of the soul, about God's dispensations in this life and another, and various matters relative to these, he blundered on some divine truths that were not quite beyond human apprehension, according to human ideas; tho' they had not been yet revealed to mankind, nor stripped of types and figures, those sacred hieroglyphics, wherein they lay involved. This answer to the question above-mentioned is plain and full: for if events, that were to come to pass in the order of providence, were foretold sometimes by men who neither knew any thing of this order, nor even that they prophesied when they did prophesy, as divines have sometimes said; why should not some truths, that

were to be manifested in after-ages by divine revelation, be anticipated by human imagination? Human reason would have never discovered them, because they are no more objects of intuitive, nor of demonstrative, than they are of sensitive, knowledge; but imagination, conceiving them possible, might impose them for true on minds wherein she exercised the plenitude of her power. Christians, therefore, might have given this answer, and have evaded by it the absurdity of supposing PLATO inspired, and the difficulty of accounting for the Christianity of his doctrines without this supposition.

## S E C T. XIII.

**I** Have insisted, and must insist again a little largely, on the theology of PLATO; though I have said a great deal in a former essay concerning his philosophy in general, in order to shew the more fully and clearly on what original authority we rest in matters of religion; and because his works have been made, after the writings of St. PAUL, a principal foundation of all that theology which has occasioned so many disputes in the world, and has rendered the Christian religion obnoxious to the cavils of infidels: one of which I undertake to refute by shewing that it is not religion, but theology, which has done all the mischief complained of so loudly and so justly. Genuine Christianity was taught by God. Theological Christianity is a religion



religion that men have invented, and that has defeated the design, by pretending the authority, of the former. Human passions, human interests, human fallibility, not those of particular doctors alone, but those of the church ecumenically assembled, from the nicean council down to that of Trent, have had their share in composing the present intricate, inconsistent, and voluminous system. I can easily believe that some of these divines meant to preserve the purity of it, and to promote revealed religion. I can believe too that such philosophers as SOCRATES and PLATO, who contributed to destroy, whilst they pretended rather to reform, polytheism and idolatry, meant to restore the purity of theism, and to promote natural religion. But here a difference between them, which is very well founded, and worthy of observation, begins to arise. The latter could support their doctrines by no authority except their own. The former had always the pretence of spiritual gifts to authorize them.

FAITH in CHRIST, the Messiah, is the first principle of Christianity, an article as plain as it is essential. But there are other articles in the gospel darkly revealed, because doubtfully expressed; besides several in the other parts of the New testament, the sense of which never has been fixed. Christian divines have supposed all these alike essential. They have supposed that, as obedience is better than sacrifice, faith is as

essential, or more essential, than works: and every sect has supposed the understanding and believing these ambiguous passages in the sense in which their teachers expound them necessary to the salvation promised in the gospel. Thus it happened formerly, and thus it happens still, that the objects of faith vary in every Christian sect: and as neutrality in the civil contests of the Athenian commonwealth was branded with a note of infamy; so in these religious contests, as they are falsely called, he who takes no side is stigmatised for an infidel by all; and he who takes any side is given over for an heretick to the hangman here, and to the devil hereafter, by every side except his own. In short, it is not enough to believe like a Christian, it is made necessary that men, women, and children should decide like metaphysicians, or believe without knowing what they believe.

If we may be allowed to think, and they who prefer the example and doctrine of CHRIST to those of PAUL will find reason to think, that the Messiah intended rather to reform, and to graft upon, Judaism, than to abolish it; we may think too that SOCRATES and PLATO intended rather to reform Paganism, and to graft something less carnal and more spiritual upon it, than by a more direct opposition to the rooted prejudices of their age and country to abolish them quite. This pious attempt cost the master his life; and made the scholar, perhaps, not only involve his  
doctrines

doctrines in greater obscurity, but seem, at least in several instances, favorable to the absurdities of Paganism. SOCRATES was a zealous missionary of morality : and the obligations of natural religion in public and private life were taught and pressed upon men both by him and PLATO, not only from motives that reason suggests, but by inculcating the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, a doctrine the most usefully believed, and the most weakly proved, says CHARRON \* ; and of a future state of rewards and punishments, which they had learned from the Egyptians, among whom these doctrines had prevailed from an unknown antiquity, and not from the Jews, who could not derive these doctrines from MOSES, and who do not appear to have entertained them till they began to tag their law with the scraps of philosophy.

ADORATION of the Supreme Being, gratitude and resignation to the order of his providence, were the great internal duties of religion, that these philosophers taught : and it is easy to discern what they thought of external worship, by several passages in PLATO. In his book *Of laws* he directs indeed that men should resort to the public temples, deliver their victims and offerings to the priests, and sacrifice and pray there only. But even in that place, where he seems to have so much regard to the uniformity of public worship, he hints sufficiently in what esteem he held

\* *De la Sagesse*, lib. i. c. 15.

it, by his invective against the superstition of private devotions; which, after all he says against them, were founded on the same principles, and performed on the same model, as those of established and public worship. He speaks most reasonably, in the Second Alcibiades, of the regard God has to a pious disposition of mind; and humorously enough of this external worship, as of an account that men pretend to keep with God, as with a banker or usurer; whereby acts of devotion performed, and benefits received, may be balanced. But the passage I choose to cite precedes these in the same dialogue. After shewing that men asked things contrary, and even hurtful to them, SOCRATES commends the prayer of the poet, who asked JUPITER to grant his friends such things as were good for them, whether they prayed that they might have them or not, and to refuse such as were hurtful, even when they desired them. From hence he takes occasion to commend likewise the custom of the Lacedemonians, who asked for good in general, and for nothing in particular, "*pulchra cum bonis*," in all their prayers public and private. They were not, however, he says, less happy than other people: and upon that occasion he tells ALCIBIADES a story, which he had heard from certain old men. The Athenians, being always beaten at land and at sea by the Lacedemonians, consulted JUPITER HAMMON to know why the gods were more favorable to their enemies, who did  
not

not worship them with the same pomp and expence as the Athenians did? HAMMON answered, that the acclamations, that is, the prayers of the Lacedemonians pleased him better than all the religious rites and ceremonies of the other Greeks.

Not only the notions of these philosophers concerning divine worship, but their notions concerning the first principle of all religion, the existence of a Supreme Being, were much more conformable to right reason, than any of those which prevailed at that time. There are many such scattered about in the writings of PLATO, which the most orthodox theist might adopt. He acknowledged one Supreme Being, eternal, ineffable, incomprehensible, all-perfect, the self-existent fountain of all existence, divine and human, himself above all essence. God is truth, but above all truth; intelligent as well as intelligible, but above all intelligence; good, but above all goodness. He is none of these, but the principle of them all, as the sun is the principle of light, and as he makes all things to be seen without being light or sight himself. In a word, PLATO acknowledged the omniscience, the omnipresence, the infinite power and wisdom of God. These are very elevated sentiments, which may be collected from his writings. They are strained as high as the utmost pitch to which we can carry our ideas, and they point still higher. So they should; for after all the efforts that the mind

mind of man is capable of making, our conceptions will fall infinitely short of their object, when this object is the majesty of the All-perfect Being. Neither PLATO, nor they who received his philosophy four or five hundred years after his time, and who were even more extravagant and less intelligible than he, could push their general and abstract notions of this sort too far. The intellectual prospect is immense, and the intellectual sight must be strained, from objects clearly and distinctly perceived, to such as are less so, and from these, still farther; till it can be strained no more, and the mind is lost in the sublimity of its own conceptions.

If these speculations cannot discover, by infinite degrees, the whole truth, they cannot lead us into any error; and they serve to maintain in our minds that awful sense, and that profound veneration of the Supreme Being, of the true God in the unity of his nature, which are due to him from every intelligent creature. Thus far, therefore, and in this manner, PLATO was an excellent master of natural theology. His errors, and those of all other pretenders to metaphysical theology, are owing to speculations of another kind, relative indeed to these, but pursued in a different spirit, the spirit of vain curiosity; and are hypothetical from the first for want of real ideas whereon to set out. In a word, they are engraftments on the religion of nature and of reason, which neither nature nor reason can

can admit. Our world seems to be, in many respects, the bedlam of every other system of intelligent creatures ; and with this unlucky circumstance, that they who are most mad govern, in things of the greatest importance, those who are least so : and CHARRON\* might very well say, that minds thought capable of prophecy, illumination, revelation, and admission into the secret councils of the gods, were such as extasy and enthusiasm transported, or sleep set on dreaming. The observation may be carried down from ancient to modern days, and may be verified by examples of Christian as well as heathen fanatics. There are, indeed, madmen little less ridiculous among those who pretend to be metaphysicians and theologians, great masters of reason, lovers of wisdom, instructors of mankind, and spiritual guides. It has been the pride and folly of these men in all ages to impose complete systems of knowledge on the world : whereas all human knowledge in it's utmost extent is deficient ; and a system of this kind, that affects to be, and that appears to be, complete, is therefore false. This folly prevailed most in the nonage of philosophy ; for as men have risen in science, they have seen their ignorance better. It continues however still in some degree, and appears on some occasions ; but is so predominant on none as on subjects that the first philosophy furnishes, on which every dabbler in theology, nay every old woman, "*quædam anicula Christiana,*" to speak like TER-

\* L. i. c. 6.

TULLIAN, is ready to explain very particularly the divine nature and attributes, the constitution of the spiritual, and the creation and government of the corporeal, world ; and, to speak like another great doctor as well as heretic, the whole scheme, order, and state of things \*.

PLATO gave encouragement, and furnished matter, to this presumption, by his engraftments on natural religion, by the extravagant notions which he propagated, and by his whole manner of philosophising. His works have stood in the place of his imaginary system of eternal ideas : and divines and metaphysicians, who have thought, like MALBRANCHE, that they consulted the Logos, and that they derived their knowledge from those abstract beings that reside in the divine intelligence, have consulted only PLATO, and have derived from his writings all the whimsies that compose their phantastical science. They may have thought themselves rapt into a third heaven, as St. PAUL says that he, or somebody that he knew, was ; or that they rose in extasy, like PLOTINUS and PORPHYRY, up to a divine union : but we may assure ourselves, that they never were rapt in any heaven but that of their own imagination, nor rose to any divine union but that with the divine PLATO. To collect all the absurdities, and manifest inconsistencies and contradictions, that are to be found in his works, would be to write

\* CLARKE in his Evidences.



a treatise bigger, and as strong at least to the purpose, as that of PLUTARCH on the repugnancies of the Stoics. To separate, from what is reasonable and true in this philosophy, all the logical puerilities, all the false sublime, all the tedious and flimsy argumentations that prove nothing; in a word, all that is unintelligible, or that informs us not when it is understood, would be a work something like to that which our VERULAM \* wished to see performed in one view, and MONTAGNE † in another: and, if I mistake not, the vogue of PLATO, the particular importance of some subjects, and the general hurt he has done to science by laying false foundations of it, considered, this work would be more useful in a third view: it would shew us to what miserable shifts the greatest men are reduced, since PLATO is to be numbered among these, when they pretend to give complete systems of knowledge divine and human under the name of philosophy ‡; when they assume unattainable knowledge to be attained, and that which is phantastical to be real. But this is a work we shall never see performed. Men, as dull or as mad as all the commentators and translators of PLATO have been, are incapable of it; and men, who are neither, will find themselves more agreeable employment.

Tho' this philosopher was not a friend to the

\* Advancement of learning, lib. iii. † Essays, chap. xii.

‡ Philosophia est divinarum et humanarum rerum scientia.  
polytheism

polytheism and idolatry of the heathen world, he was not an enemy to superstition. Far from going about to destroy it, he refined, he spiritualised it, and intrenched it more in mystery. He made it more plausible, and more secure from the attacks to which it stood exposed before. He made use indeed, on some occasions, for ornament or illustration, of fables taken from the current mythology, like that of LOVE begot by PORUS on PENIA, when he was drunk in JUPITER'S orchard, and the gods were met to celebrate the birth of VENUS: but the divine mythology he taught purposely was not so gross. The gods of the heathen had been men. The sepulchres of these immortals were shewn; and they retained in heaven the passions, the manners, and the habits of the earth. The celestial kingdom was peopled, like other countries, by colonies from abroad, by naturalizations of foreigners, and by the generations of those who had been there so long, that they seemed the aborigines of the country. The gods of PLATO were of another sort. They were generated indeed, for he supposed too a production and propagation of divinities; but the image of this generation was changed, and gods were said to be produced by emanation or procession; emanations from the first divine essence, like beams from the sun; processions, or rather extensions of the supreme and simple substance\*; for thus

\* *Profusio quaedam et extensio summae et simplicis substantiae.*

they

they have been explained by the platonics. In some such incomprehensible, if not ineffable, manner (for what is ineffable to one of these philosophers?) souls, angels, and demons were produced; by the supposed existence of the two last of which, visions and dreams, and every art of divination, and every superstition of magic, was upheld.

THIS little, that I have said, may stand as a general specimen of the platonic theology in this place; for in another, I shall give some that will be more particular. No man ever dreamed so wildly as this author writ—"velut aegri somnia, vanae finguntur species." But, as he had no divine mission nor authority to claim, all this rested on his own authority: he was to prove it as he could, and every man was at liberty to receive or reject all or any of these doctrines as he found the proof. Thus they remained purely hypothetical: nor could be made dogmatical, till Christian divines made them so, by adopting them as parts of divine revelation. Then, indeed, they became dogmas to Christians: and before that time, they were not such to many of the heathens. They could not be such to PLATO himself, whatever they were to some of his disciples. He, who published them, knew that he invented them, or that he borrowed them from those that did invent them, and that neither he nor they were led to them by any chain of knowledge. Neither he nor they could be the bubbles of these

doctrines; tho' they, who received them for true theology, were so. It is not he who makes, but he who swallows the wine, that gets drunk. But as soon as Christians found some, and thought they found others, of these doctrines in the gospel, the difference I mentioned, between the authority of these divines, and that of the divines of Paganism, was complete. The authority of revelation confirming that of PLATO, propositions, that were dubious to the one, became certain to the others, and philosophical conjectures became articles of faith: just as it happened afterwards, when the authority of ARISTOTLE was added to both, and new doctrines were devised, by metaphysical explanations and extensions, under pretence of defending the former.

Nothing less than this could have established and continued the theology of PLATO. In his days, and long after them, philosophy was for the most part very hypothetical. Physics were so. What wonder if metaphysics were more, nay wholly, so? When PLATO had brought these, and ARISTOTLE logic, into repute, one of them made the material world metaphysically, the other logically, and both very absurdly. But when they set themselves, and PLATO especially, to raise an immaterial intellectual world, metaphysical and logical architecture were most properly employed. They could employ no other: they knew little, imagined much, built beyond nature;

nature; and terms and phrases, which supported their schemes, covered equally the deficiency and the futility of their matter: not unlike to those columns and entablatures of painted pasteboard, that imitate the solidity of marble and deceive the eye. This was the least laborious, the shortest and surest way to fame: and whilst men neglected the analyse of ideas, and attended to the forms of argumentation, it was no hard matter to throw words into such forms, as were sufficient to keep up dispute, in the defence of any doctrines. An hypothesis, plausible to the reason, or to the prejudices, or to the predominant affections and passions, of men, formed a sect; and as soon as a sect was formed, the hypothesis became a demonstrated system, which the honor of the sect was concerned to maintain. There were many such among the Greeks: and they were all defended and attacked with equal obstinacy, till time and contests wore them out. If platonism was not better founded in reason and knowledge than others, it was kept up long with greater art, and had greater good fortune afterwards. PLATO gave occasion to both: to the first directly, and by choice; to the last indirectly, and by chance. His immediate successors, SPEUSIPPUS, XENOCRATES, POLEMO, CRATES, CRANTOR, had acquired no great fame, nor had any great success. The portic and the gardens of EPICURUS rivalled the academy, in opposing dogma to dogma. ARCESILAUS, therefore, and CAR-

NEADES changed the conduct of this philosophical war. By affirming nothing, they left their adversaries nothing to attack; and by assuming, in consequence, the right of disputing against every thing, they were at liberty to take their advantage wherever they found it. The example of their founder, and of his master, suggested this expedient to them, and countenanced them in the use of it. They became terrible to the Stoicians, and to the Epicureans, and to all the dogmatists.

As these men pretended to revive the first academy by reverting to scepticism, tho' they were called authors of a second and a third, and therefore academic philosophers; so there were others, who under pretence of adhering to the first academy, professed themselves dogmatists, and affected to be named Platonicians. Some of these men indeed became Peripatetics, or slid from platonism into stoicism, like the philosopher ANTIOCHUS whom TULLY mentions\*; whilst the suspension of assent was still maintained, as the true principle of the academy old and new, by CLITOMACHUS, PHILO, and TULLY. VARRO says, in the Academics, there was no difference between the Peripatetics, certain dogmatists no doubt, and the old academy†.

\* In Academ.

† Nihil enim inter peripateticos, et illam veterem academiam, differebat.

TULLY says, that the academy they called the new, appeared to him to be the same as the old†. Thus the matter stood in Greece and at Rome. But the platonism that prevailed in Asia and Egypt, and was taught in the famous school of Alexandria, was unquestionably dogmatical in every point. If the philosophers in those countries did not find it, they made it, such. It could not otherwise have suited the characters, nor have answered the purposes of Jews, of Christians, and of those who opposed Christianity : by all of whom it was, in some degree, and in a different manner, adopted, according to the method of the eclectic sect that POTAMO of Alexandria founded. The object of this sect was very specious. These philosophers were to select the best and truest placits from all others. But we may conclude that they selected, conformably to the human character, such as agreed best with their own opinions ; according to the account DIOGENES LAERTIUS || gives of POTAMO, that he chose those things that pleased him most. Thus the Jews took some dogmas, the Christians more, and the Pagans most of all, from PLATO's philosophy ; which became accidentally of greater extent, duration, and importance, than the author had any reason to expect.

† Hanc academiam novam appellabant, quae mihi vetus videtur.

|| In praefat.

THERE are many things unintelligible in the ancient philosophers, many inconsistent and contradictory, even among those who wrote with the greatest clearness and precision; for I except neither CICERO nor SENECA. It would be time well saved to neglect the first: and nothing can be more ridiculous, than the pains that learned men take to disguise or reconcile the others, instead of owning them to be, what after all their pains they are forced to leave them, inconsistencies and contradictions. But PLATO has this peculiar advantage over all the philosophers of any name. He has puzzled mankind, not only by particular passages in his writings, but about his own general character as an author. The dogmatists, and the sceptics, for such in truth the academicians were, have claimed him: and it is at this hour a problematical point at least, whether this great philosopher and divine gave a full assent to the truth of his own doctrines. To all of them, to some of the principal, he could not. They were the fruits of his own and of other mens invention; and he must have been conscious that they were so, as I observed above.

## S E C T. XIV.

IT is in itself of little moment in what spirit, and on what motive, PLATO writ, who, or what he was. The weight of reason, and not the authority of an author, should decide our  
 opinions;



opinions \*: and this philosopher himself speaks very strongly to this purpose, in many places, in the Gorgias particularly†. If a doctrine, which PLATO taught, be supported by reason or revelation, we ought to receive it with that assent which is due to truth; tho' he were a sceptic under the mask of a dogmatist. If any of his doctrines are supported neither by reason nor revelation, we ought to reject them; tho' he were a dogmatist under the mask of a sceptic. This is evident: and yet Christian divines have been in all ages as zealous to make him pass for a dogmatist, as if nothing more was necessary to establish the truth of a doctrine than to be assured that he thought it true, and taught it as such. In the mean time, they did not enough consider that they made a fool or a knave of their favorite philosopher. Wrong methods of inquiring after truth and knowledge, and frequent contentions about them, ended in a dispute at last, not whether there was any such thing as truth, but whether there was any such thing as knowledge. From hence arose dogmatists, acataleptics, and sceptics‡. If PLATO was one of the former,

C c 4

who

\* Non tam auctores—quam rationis momenta querenda sunt. CIRC. De nat. deor. l. i.

†—Alii alios se convincere arbitrantur, cum—multos et celebres testes produxerint—verum haec probationis ratio nullius est momenti ad veritatem, &c.

‡ Ex philosophis alii se verum adinvenisse jactant, et dogmatici appellantur. Alii pronunciant, verum nec inveniri

who boasted that they had found the truth, and if there can be on every subject one opinion alone true, how came he to have different opinions on the same subject, not transiently nor inadvertently mentioned, but formally delivered and maintained? In the other two characters, if he believed all things to be absolutely incomprehensible, or if he restrained his assent because, tho' he did not deny that truth might be found, he did not determine neither that it had been found; in these two characters, I say, he might very fairly, tho' not very usefully, deliver contrary opinions, and defend or oppose any of them hypothetically. But neither the supposition of two doctrines, nor of two senses, nor of two characters, in PLATO, that stale artifice by which critics make authors say or not say whatever they please, will excuse him as a dogmatist, if he was one, and a dogmatist too who treated the most important points of knowledge, since the being of a God, the worship of him, the first principles of things, and the conduct of providence, were some of the objects of it.

My way of thinking, which I have found nowhere the least reason to alter, would hinder me from any farther consideration of PLATO in this respect, if it was not worth our while to con-

*veniri nec percipi posse, et cataleptici dicuntur.—Alii, assensum sustinentes, neque statuunt verum inventum esse, neque inveniri posse negant, et dicuntur sceptici, consideratores, et ephectici, cohibitores assensus.*

sider how feebly the authorities we value the most are often founded. The fathers of the Christian church, have maintained that PLATO was a dogmatist, and well they might; since NUMENIUS, a pythagorean philosopher, asserted the same of PYRRHO, and since SEXTUS EMPIRICUS says \* that ARCESILAUS was suspected to be another. With the paradox concerning PYRRHO I have nothing to do; but surely it is as little possible to imagine what grounds SEXTUS, who lived four hundred years after ARCESILAUS, or St. AUSTIN, who lived above a century later, or indeed any man of his own age, country, or school, could have to make a dogmatist of one, who disclaimed all knowledge, like him, even that which SOCRATES excepted, the knowledge of his ignorance, as it is to imagine what NUMENIUS meant when he imputed dogmatism to PYRRHO. A man, who made it the business of his life, and the principle of his profession, to dispute against every proposition that could be advanced, was not surely a sceptic in appearance alone, “*prima fronte,*” as SEXTUS says, but inwardly, and in very good earnest. Notwithstanding this, St. AUSTIN † took the fact for granted, and wrought up in his warm imagination a very subtle and pious scheme of policy, which is almost too fanciful for the saint, and which no man, less visionary than he, can believe that the philoso-

\* Lib. i. cap. 31.

† Ep. ad DIOSC. ep. cxviii. ed. bened.

pher ever entertained. Some such there have been, however, and a reverend father ‡ of the oratory in France, has treated this whimſy very ſeriouſly.

THE Stoicians then, according to St. AUSTIN, placing the chief happineſs of man in virtue, that is, in the mind ; the Epicureans placing it in volupty, that is, in the body ; and the Platonists placing it in the enjoyment of God, the latter judged very wiſely, that it was proper to prepare the way to truth by deſtroying, in the firſt place, the errors of thoſe ſects. They ſaw that their own ſublime doctrine would fall into contempt, if they publiſhed it among men immerſed in ſenſe, like the Epicureans ; or even among the Stoicians, who gave the preference indeed to virtue, but who could not raiſe their conceptions up to ſomething divine and immaterial, to ſomething above mind as above body, to ſomething knowable by pure intellect, and yet far ſuperior to it, that is, up to God. They knew that they ſhould not be heard, if they went about to teach men, who believed atoms, or the four elements, to be the firſt principles of all things, that all things proceeded from an immaterial wiſdom †. They conſidered farther, that the Epicureans being perſuaded their ſenſes never deceived

‡ THOMASSIN *De la maniere d'étudier la philoſ.*

† N. B. This is ſaid purely to do honor to PLATO, for he was abſurd enough to make matter and ideas firſt principles jointly with God.

them ;

them; and the Stoicians believing, like the Aristotelians, that altho' their senses might sometimes deceive them, yet they could not acquire, without the assistance of their senses, any knowledge of the truth of things, it would be to little purpose to tell either the one or the other that the only Being, which has a real existence, cannot be represented to the mind by any of the images of sense; and that this immutable Being is that alone which we conceive truly; because pure intellect, which alone perceives the truth of things, alone perceives the existence of this Being.

Now since ARCESILAUS could not flatter himself that these sublime doctrines would be received, against the philosophical prejudices that prevailed in his time, it behoved him to look forward, and to convey the pure streams that flowed from the springs PLATO had opened, as ST. AUSTIN \* expresses himself in one of his letters, through a channel shaded and covered by brambles and thorns, lest they should be exposed to beasts that would render them foul and muddy. Nothing less than a submissive faith, such a faith as he mentions in his letter to CONSENTIUS †, a faith that must precede reason in order to purify the heart, and to prepare the mind to comprehend what it ought to admit implicitly at first, could impose such doctrines; and nothing less than the authority of one, who was God and man, could

\* To HERMOG. ep. i. ed. benedic. † Ep. cxx. ed. benedic.

impose such a faith. Now the Platonicians could produce no authority of this kind, nor shew a God abased and humbled, before the coming of CHRIST. They were in the right, therefore, to conceal their doctrines, till this great event happened. But as soon as it happened, they opened the whole secret of their theology and metaphysics. Some of them, indeed, were corrupted by the damnable curiosity of magic. But many of them acknowledged JESUS to be that God and man, in whom immutable wisdom and truth were incarnated, and by whose mouth the eternal essence had spoken to mankind.

SUCH are the notions that St. AUSTIN endeavours to give in some of his epistles, and in his books against the academics, to establish the opinion that PLATO was a dogmatist, and to account for the conduct of his sceptical followers. But this ingenious scheme hangs ill together. What has been said above, concerning the motives that ARCESILAUS had to make a public profession of scepticism, seems much more probable than what our African bishop advances. PLATO had rivals and enemies among the philosophers, ARISTIPPUS and DIOGENES the cynic, for instance, who embarrassed him more than once. But in his time, and for some time after him, no school grew up that could vie with his. ARISTOTLE, who founded one that became famous, heard PLATO twenty years, that is, till PLATO died. EPICURUS did not come to

Athens till XENOCRATES was at the head of the academy, nor begin to teach so soon ; and ZENO, and ARCESILAUS were scholars of POLEMO at the same time. Thus far the course of the academy glided smoothly on. But here the contests began ; and the subtilties of the portic were the more to be feared by ARCESILAUS, because ZENO, who set up this rival school, had been received in the academy, and had learned, like a spy, where and how it might be attacked with most advantage. Other dogmatic sects grew up and strengthened at the same time : and the surest way to divert their attacks, was to attack them all on this one principle established by SOCRATES, “ Nihil sciri, nihil percipi posse.” If ARCESILAUS had gone about to defend his master’s doctrines, which were not easy to be defended, surrounded as he was by enemies, he must have been beat on every side ; whereas, by renouncing all pretensions to knowledge, he had nothing to defend, had no recrimination to fear, and might attack with his whole force. We may add, perhaps, a motive of pique to this of policy ; for besides that ARCESILAUS was piqued personally by ZENO, who employed the arms he had acquired in the academy against that school, nothing could be more provoking than the arrogance wherewith the Stoics exacted the same assent to their most extravagant paradoxes, as the mind gives to truths that are objects even of intuitive knowledge. Thus we may easily conceive that it happened in philosophy on this occasion,

caſion, as it has happened in religion on many. Exceſs on one ſide produced exceſs on the other. So ſabellianiſm gave occaſion to arianiſm, and the foppery of Rome to the ruſticity of Geneva. So the dogmatical preſumption of ZENO, who affirmed the world to be a rational animal, as confidently as he affirmed it to be light at noon \*, puſhed ARCESILAUS to deny every kind and degree of knowledge.

BUT it is not enough to have ſhewn that this account is probable, unleſs a ſhort and obvious reflection be added to ſhew that it is impoſſible the motives St. AUSTIN aſſigns to the conduct of ARCESILAUS and the academics ſhould be true. Now I aſk, whether theſe philoſophers could mean to conceal the doctrines of PLATO, which had been publicly taught by more of his ſucceſſors than St. AUSTIN mentions, and which were contained in his writings? They might abandon the defence of theſe doctrines, and ſhew little regard to them; but they could not mean to conceal them, and reſerve them for a more proper conjuncture, as St. AUSTIN aſſerts. They might do ſo the rather, and with a due regard to the honor of their founder, ſince by abandoning theſe they did not abandon him. He had jumbled two oppoſite characters moſt prepoſterouſly together. He was ſometimes apparently a dogmatist, and made even

\*.—Nec magis apparebit nunc lucere, quoniam ſtoicus, quam hunc mundum eſſe ſapientem. Acad.



SOCRATES talk in that style. But still the known sceptical character of the master was the real character of the scholar. This character therefore ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES assumed, as soon as it was for the honor and interest of their school to abandon the other; and deemed themselves, no doubt, more truly Platonicians, than any of those who had been at the head of the academy before them. I confound ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES together, as TULLY does; for tho' there might be some difference, which I will not have the trouble of considering, between the notions CARNEADES had, and those of ARCESILAUS, concerning the causes of incomprehensibility; yet they both maintained, with equal zeal, and CARNEADES, it is said, with greater force of argument, that we are unable to arrive at the truth of things by sense or by reason.

IF SOCRATES was not so great a genius, even with the help of his demon, as he has been represented, he was certainly something better than a genius. He was a very good man: and I find in myself an unwillingness to believe him absolutely a sceptic, both on this account, and on account of that predilection, which you know that another good man, our friend the bishop of CLOYNE, has for him. That he might be such, as to physics and all the sciences which the Greeks called mathematics, or disciplines\*, I can

\* AUL. GELLIUS.

easily believe. XENOPHON gave the lie to PLATO, and all those who pretended that he taught them ; and SOCRATES himself complained bitterly, when he heard the Lyfis read †, of PLATO's misrepresentations. No philosopher could be so easily, nor so safely, misrepresented. He preached, but he did not write : and we know nothing more of his philosophy than the scraps his auditors retained, some of which XENOPHON has given us more truly, and PLATO more copiously. He picked up scholars occasionally in the streets and public places of Athens, and was a missionary of virtue to them all, from ALCIBIADES down to the meanest citizen. He rather refuted the sophists, than labored to instruct directly : and this he did by a perpetual dissimulation of his own opinions, and an ironical deference to theirs; which manner might give an air of scepticism to all he said, even on moral subjects. In short, if I cannot believe him a dogmatist, I will not believe him an absolute sceptic.

SOCRATES may be compared to the Cimmerians, who were deprived of the light of the sun, but were not in utter darkness. He founded his ethics on probability, if you please ; but it was on such a probability, as TULLY explains in his reply to LUCULLUS: such a probability, as a wise man must rest upon, or all the rules of life will be subverted. If this was so, the difference between SOCRATES, and ARCESILAUS, and

† DIOG. LAERTIUS.

CARNÉADES was very great. They did not admit, at least the former did not, the faint light of probability, and could be scarce distinguished from those who professed pyrrhonism: tho' St. AUSTIN thought fit to employ even the former, very piously, in preparing the way for the reception of the gospel; for which he had no authority whatever except that of his own wild imagination. For the dogmatism of SOCRATES and of PLATO, and for a distinction between the old and new academy, he had some indeed. CICERO introduces LUCULLUS, in the Academical questions, comparing ARCESILAUS to TIBERIUS GRACCHUS; and complaining, that as one of these disturbed the peace of an excellent commonwealth, so the other overturned philosophy, when it was brought to perfection. But TULLY decides the controversy, without regard to probable arguments, by an appeal to fact. He had a bigot veneration for PLATO. He had studied his works so long, and had familiarised himself with them so much, that he seemed to have lived with this philosopher, "*ut pene cum his vixisse*" "*videar;*" as he says of himself. He knew PLATO better, than St. AUSTIN, and he asserted, that the new academy was the same as the old\*, if PLATO, who founded it, was to be reckoned of the old, in whose works nothing was affirmed, who disputed for and against many

\* *Academiam novam, quae mihi vetus videtur.*

things, inquired about all, and advanced none as certain †.

IF PLATO must be reckoned, notwithstanding this, a dogmatist, it will be equally impossible to justify the regard that the Christian fathers, most of them at least, paid to him themselves, and that they encouraged others to pay; nor the use that they made of his writings. They, who called him the homerical philosopher, thought more justly of him, than they who called him the attic MOSES, or than they, who, still more prophanely, put him and PLOTINUS, and even JESUS CHRIST, in matters of doctrine, on a level ‥. By doing this they defiled Christianity with many superstitious notions, and mixed their theology up with much of that imaginary science about divine, angelical, and human natures, which was derived from Egypt and the east, through PYTHAGORAS and PLATO chiefly, to the Greeks and the Romans; and, from these two philosophers, through the school of Alexandria more than any other way (for dogmatical platonism, which included both, flourished in that school more than it had ever done in the academy) to the whole Christian world.

BUT farther, and to set this proceeding off in all the colors it deserves, are we sure that PLA-

† Nihil affirmatur—in utramque partem multa differuntur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur.

‥ Vid. Ep. NEBRIDII ad AUGUST.

to, tho' a dogmatist, was much in earnest on every point of theology which the fathers of the church took from him, and incorporated into the Christian system, as explanatory of it, or additional to it? He might not be so most certainly. DES CARTES was dogmatist enough in all conscience; and yet, without derogating from this part of his character, we may believe that he was not very serious when he revived the whimsical notion of GOMEZ PEREYRA, that beasts are automates, or pieces of clock-work; nor, perhaps, when he maintained the plenum. He had his particular reasons, of prudence, to shelter himself from some attacks that he might apprehend; and of consistency, to make the hypothetical parts of his philosophy hang the better together, as well as of conformity to certain received opinions. PLATO might have reasons of the same, or of other kinds. It would not be hard to point out some such: and if he had no other, philosophical ostentation alone, and the desire of acquiring fame by the publication of a new and more sublime system, for so all things that are unintelligible in metaphysical theology are called, would have determined him to ransack ancient legends, as well as his own imagination, for every thing that might serve to this purpose. We may believe this the more easily, since there runs through all his works a tinfelled embroidery of this kind, on a ground of low conceits and tedious irony:

“Purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus, et alter  
 “Adfuitur pannus.”

Now if PLATO may be justly suspected of such a proceeding, how ridiculous, as well as absurd and profane, ought we to esteem that of the fathers of the church? if the doctrines of PLATO are conformable to the gospel, which I think they are not exactly in any one instance, except in some of the moral doctrines, it is absurd; if they are different, or more extensive in any respect, it is profane, to make them a supplemental code to the evangelical system of faith. But if he published things that were neither dictated to him by his reason, nor even believed by him, whatever these things were, and how true soever they might appear on some other authority, it was sovereignly ridiculous to accept them in any degree for such on his. Of all this absurdity, profaneness, and ridicule, they who built up Christian theology were guilty. Instead of commenting Platonism by Christianity, they commented Christianity by Platonism. Instead of applying revelation to explain, and the authority of the revealer to confirm, what they thought to be true in his writings, they applied Platonic philosophy to introduce and explain Christian, and the authority of PLATO to confirm what they received for true on the authority of CHRIST. They added the epistles to the gospels, the doctrines of PAUL to those of CHRIST; and to all these, the reveries of heathen philosophy,

phy, rabbinical extravagance, and Christian enthusiasm, till the Apocalypse became a part of our holy scriptures, and the Athanasian-creed a summary of our faith.

## S E C T. XV.

**I**D O not expect, on this occasion, from you the answer I should be sure to have from persons more orthodox, than I know you to be, in the faith of the pretended catholic church. Such persons would insist on the authority of the church, by which all this heathen lore has been sanctified; and ground this authority on passages of the scriptures, as they ground the authority of the scriptures on that of the church. This circular proof would deserve no other answer, than that of silent contempt. CLEMENT of Alexandria opens another way to justify himself, and other fathers, for adopting so much heathen theology into Christianity. He supposes every system of Grecian and barbarian philosophy to have been a branch of the eternal truth\*; and all these branches to have been united in the Christian system, like the trunk of the tree of all divine truth. Thus the doctrines of heathen theology, that were taught by PLATO and PYTHAGORAS, and derived from Egypt and the east, are not sanctified by a sort of retro-active power, but are made divine by their original. If

\*—Aeternae veritatis avulsam quandam particulam. Strom. lib. i.

now by these terms we do not understand that the human mind rises up to the Supreme Mind, is united with it, and contemplates the ideas that are in it; if we do not understand, that the intellect of man is a part of the intellect of God, as the soul of man was thought to be a part of the Deity, or of the soul of the universe; in short, if we do not understand them according to any of those mystical, metaphysical notions, that platonism propagated, and that CLEMENT was very likely to intend, they are capable of receiving a very true sense. There are, no doubt, in theology some truths that human reason, the gift of God, and in this sense alone divine, is sufficient to demonstrate, according to those criterions of human knowledge, the things that are, and that we know to be, as the author of all nature ordained that they should appear to creatures in our rank of being. Several such truths the Pagan philosophers discovered. But then they blended them with monstrous errors, derived from various extremes, by planning the divine order and economy on the human, or by neglecting the phaenomena of nature, or by making extravagant hypotheses to account for them. They discovered the unity of the Godhead, and they saw that worship is due from the creature to the creator. But then they ran into ditheism; and gave up the unity, that they might save the goodness, of the Supreme Being, which they imagined very falsely to be, as atheists objected that it was, inconsistent with the phaenomena,



nomena. They ran farther into polytheism, that they might provide a multitude of agents or ministers to execute the will of God, and to govern under him, or to be mediators and intercessors with him in behalf of mankind. As they took notions of mediation and intercession, so they took others of atonement and expiation, from the characters of men and of governments. Hence the offerings and sacrifices, sanguinary sacrifices, human sacrifices, such as the Carthaginians, our Druids, the Mexicans, and other barbarous people, have instituted; from which examples of the utmost depravation of human reason, that ignorance, superstition, and habits of cruelty can beget, divines would sometimes prove that such sacrifices, and the appeasing of God by blood †, are agreeable to the natural reason of mankind.

It must be confessed, however, that, even in these days, men, whose natural reason was not thus

† Vid. THOMASSIN, *Maniere d'étudier la philosoph. &c.*

It may be worth while to observe here what is said by a very great and worthy man, in a book writ on the principles of HUTCHINSON, to shew that Christianity is indeed very near as old as the creation. He admits that this belief is of all others the most unreasonable, except as it is explained in the original. What now is the original, by the explanation of which this belief becomes reasonable? It was the decree of God, that a Saviour should die to atone by his blood for the sins of men. It was there-  
fore

thus depraved, saw by the light of reason alone how abominable such rites as these were, and, little by little, as their reason improved, how absurd all their other rites, and almost all their theological opinions, were. Polytheism was mitigated : idolatry was in good measure distinguished away, among the philosophers at least : oracles and the arts of divination grew into contempt ; and if heathenism was kept up by men above the vulgar, it seemed to be so only by the priests for lucre, and by others for fear of having no religion at all. Thus the way was prepared by reason for revelation, in the countries where Christianity first appeared, and which were enlightened by philosophy. Philosophy had begun to spiritualise religion, by exploding many of the gross, the carnal conceptions of heathen theology ;

fore his command, that, to keep this revelation in mind, the future sacrifice of the Saviour should be emblematically and prophetically represented by shedding the blood of beasts in sacrifices, accompanied with many typical and emblematical circumstances. No other invention could be so likely to preserve, and perpetuate, the knowledge and belief of a revelation so necessary to mankind. Strange absurdities ! the bloody sacrifice to be made so many thousand years afterwards was that of the Son of God, of the very God ; and the emblematical institution continued among men, who soon forgot that it was typical and emblematical only. Thus it served to no other purpose, than to lead men into an opinion, that the deity was implacable, and sins unforgiveable, unless he was appeased, and they were atoned for, by the shedding of blood.

and

and by substituting an inward devotion, purity of heart, and a pious disposition of mind, to the outward pomp and ceremony of worship. That this representation is true, the works of PLATO alone would be sufficient to prove; altho' EUSEBIUS\* was desirous to make it believed that no reformation had been made even in the opinions of philosophers, before Christianity: but that, being then grown ashamed of their polytheism and idolatry, they endeavoured to conceal them under the pretence and disguise of allegory. In all cases, when Christianity was once established, the means of carrying this reformation of opinions to perfection were in the hands of Christian philosophers and divines. It might have been expected too that revelation would unite, in one uniform system of theology, all the converted pagans, whom reason had not been able to reconcile; since they had now, in the word of God, a sure criterion, by which to try the truth of their opinions.

THE very contrary happened. They differed as much as ever, and with uncharitableness and hatred that had been unknown to them before their conversion. Whilst they were pagans, they disputed without quarrelling, and even embraced opposite sects without becoming enemies. We see the Stoic, the Epicurean, and the Academic meeting amicably together in TULLY's works, which represent the manners of the age.

\* Praep. evangel.

They endeavour to refute one another ; but they live in the utmost intimacy of friendship : and if CARNEADES was exasperated against the Stoics †, on account of their dogmatical, and, as we may venture to pronounce, their trifling but assuming, airs, neither TULLY nor even COTTA were so. Nay the former inclined, as much as an Academic could incline, to stoicism : and SENECA, who was professedly of this sect, and he, speak often with the greatest regard of EPICURUS, and with the greatest tenderness of their epicurean friends.

How it came to pass that men, who had embraced opposite opinions without acrimony, whilst they were heathens, became inveterate enemies for this very reason, when they were Christians ; or how they came to be more divided than ever, even when they had one common rule of faith and doctrine which they all acknowledged alike, is not very hard to conceive. Whilst they were merely philosophers, they were attached to some sect or other, not only by the illusions of their own imaginations, by their affections and passions, by ambition and private interest, but by prejudices and habits contracted early, and sometimes before they were able to judge for themselves \*.

To

†—Contra quorum disciplinam ingenium ejus [CARNEADIS] exarserat. Tusc. disp. lib. v.

\*—Caeteri primum ante tenentur adstricti, quam, quid esset optimum, judicare potuerunt.—infirmissimo tempore aetatis, aut obsecuti amico cuidam, aut una alicujus, quem  
primum

To this sect, whichever it was, they adhered: and that which we may observe frequently in the political struggles of our miserable parties, happened, no doubt, in those theological contentions. A false point of honor prevailed sometimes over the love of truth; it determined the will even against the judgment; and men chose rather to err with those with whom they had long erred, than go right in new company, or alone. But still, as they were mere philosophers, and had nothing but reason, their own or that of their party, to oppose to reason in every instance in which they differed, and as the particular opinions of no one sect interested the whole body of philosophers, the state, or the church, in any country; these men might differ, before their conversion to Christianity, without those incentives to uncharitableness and hatred, which acted so powerfully on the malignity of their hearts afterwards. As soon as this malignity could exert itself, under the specious pretence of zeal for the honor of God and for the purity of the faith, it broke out with violence. Every side assumed that the word of God spoke in favor of them; that the salvation of souls depended on believing as they believed; and that all those who dissented from them were guilty of heresy: for this word grew soon into fashion, and from having,

*primum audierunt, oratione capti, de rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhaerescunt. Acad. quaest.*

as I believe, a very innocent signification at first, it came, like the word tyrant, and some others, to convey a very odious idea at last. Heretics then were enemies to God, and rebels to his law. They were to be treated as such by the orthodox : and heresy and orthodoxy being determined by the strength and weakness of parties, alternate, and therefore constant, persecution was established in the church of CHRIST.

*The end of the Second Volume.*



























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